

CUD

“Cows Under Discussion” or “Something to Chew On”



August 2021

Clinic news

The sunshine at the beginning of August has been very welcome, just in time for the arrival of the first calves. By the time you receive this, many of you will have had the first milk collection of the season, so things will be well underway. Please keep an eye out for your neighbours over the next few weeks. With the busy-ness of calving and the intense pressure on farming from external forces we will all be feeling under the pump at times. A quick chat across the fence or on the roadside might be all that is required to recognise someone who is struggling and help them out. If you've got new neighbours this season, pop over and say hello before things get really crazy, just as we have been trying to welcome them to the district.

In early July, the board of your Vet Club ratified some changes to the “Executive Management Group” - the group of senior vets who are jointly charged with managing the practice. Having being involved in this group since its inception in 2010, Sid Taylor has stepped down, to enjoy more time at the golf course. Sid is continuing on as a “hands on” dairy vet though, so we can still draw on his vast clinical knowledge and experience for a while longer. In his place, Steve Butler has been appointed to the group. Many of you will know Steve, who has been at Clutha Vets for 12 years. His dairy work is focused around Clinton, but Steve is also active across all the other species we deal with.

Keeping it simple

Painting cows in their metrichecking batch colour as they calve, will make life much simpler in a month's time. As you move the freshly-calved cows out of the colostrums and into the milkers, it's a good time to check each one's tags and calving records, strip for mastitis, and give the lighter condition animals a worm drench (Eprinex). Some farmers are also giving a B12 injection at this stage to help stimulate appetite in the earliest part of the lactation.

If you do find any sign of mastitis, a cleanly-taken milk sample, labelled and frozen, can be a very helpful tool later on, if a bigger mastitis problem emerges. Those with a Mastatest box on farm should run their samples straight away (fresh), both to get the maximum value out of the box, and also because it is not designed for samples that have been frozen. There is also a growing trend to give cows that show milk changes without udder changes pain relief (Ketomax) in the first instance, and move on to antibiotics only if the milk doesn't clear within a couple of milkings, or if the udder starts to become inflamed (swollen, hard, hot, cold or painful).

How are the cows doing? - Energy Watch

At calving time, a number of diseases are related to each other—decreased eating reduces energy intake and pushes cows towards negative energy balance (NEB). Decreased eating also makes the cows more prone to milk fever. Down cows are more likely to be “dirty” with post calving uterine infections (as are cows with NEB) and more likely to get mastitis. Each of these in turn decreases appetite, and so the cycle goes on. One thing you can do to get a handle on this is measure the NEB in your herd—particularly the freshly calved cows, through a simple programme we call “Energy Watch”. With a small blood sample from about 15 cows, we can use a cow-side test to measure the level of the chemical compounds that indicate ketosis, giving you an early warning that the girls may need some extra energy inputs to help stay healthy and maximise peak lactation.

Why use pain relief?

Research from the last few years has shown that many cows benefit from treatment with pain relief (eg Ketomax, Rheumocam or Metacam), not just those who are obviously “sick”. It is known that the chemicals that control inflammation in the body, affect the ovary and its developing eggs. Thus, inflammation from mastitis, lameness, and other causes of pain around calving time, may decrease the cow’s ability to get in-calf at mating a few weeks later.

We now recommend pain relief for all cows with mastitis (not just those with the hot, swollen udders that we used to talk about treating), because it has been shown to not only increase cure rates, but also help those cows get in calf. Lamé cows have also been shown to get better, sooner if they are given pain relief alongside other treatments.

Calves that are given anti-inflammatory as well as sedation and local anaesthetic recover better and faster from disbudding; and scouring calves are much more likely to drink if they are given pain relief.

People’s attitude to pain in animals (and treating it) are changing all the time. If we use more pain relief, we not only feel better for having done the right thing, but we also will see production benefits.

Care of down cows

There are a couple of devices on the market that can greatly aid the recovery (even survival) of down cows. We stock a range of cow covers, from the old-school jute ones, which can be worn by a sitting or standing cow; to the “Bivvy” and “Wrappa” type blankets for down cows with neck fastening and weighted edges to create a “tent”.

A rumen full of warm fluid can also make a huge difference to a sick cow. This can be easily and safely administered with a Selegt rumen pump. Various salts can be added to aid in rehydration and restoring chemical imbalances in the blood.



The Brains Scheme

If the above fail, don’t forget the “Mad Cow Disease” surveillance scheme is a way you can salvage good money from suitable cows that are not going to make it through the Spring. MPI will now pay you \$285 for any brain that we send in from a cow that we have seen, aged between 30 months and 9 years that has a non-responsive nervous disease or metabolic disorder with no obvious injury (ie downer cows). If you have a cow that may fit the criteria, give us a call to discuss her options, and do your bit for the country, by helping MPI to demonstrate we don’t have any “TSE” diseases here.

Things to do in August

- ◇ Pop in to one of our stores to stock up on your calving supplies, including metabolics, prescribed RVMs for mastitis etc and cow covers
- ◇ Scours vaccination (later calvers) - 2 to 12 weeks before expected calving date (depending on product)
- ◇ Pre calving trace element supplementation (selenium, iodine, Vitamin B12 or a combination product)
- ◇ Worm drench for light cows, before or at calving (use a NIL withhold product!)
- ◇ Energy watch on freshly calved cows to monitor for ketosis, and check calcium and magnesium levels
- ◇ “Well Calf Check” to ensure your colostrum management is adequate
- ◇ Book in first calf disbudding and metrichecking visits
- ◇ Tail paint group 1 (first 2-3 weeks / 50% of cows) for metrichecking