

# CUD

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



February 2023

## Clinic News

We hope you have managed to get a bit of a summer holiday, hopefully making the most of the hot and dry weather, that is now making grass scarce throughout most of the area. Hopefully some recent rain may be the start to an easing of the situation.

We are glad to be welcoming some new team members. Sam Looney and Emma Shaw will both be based at Milton. It's good to have our Sam tally back to three, it keeps everyone guessing who is who! Anneke Muller is our brand new Massey grad based at the Clutha clinic, you'll see her out and about over the next few months getting to know you all. Dan Patterson is our new tech in Clutha, recently graduated from SIT Telford. Dan has a height advantage that is going to be a tremendous asset in the cowsheds!! There are a few new staff coming up, more about them next time. Marcus Yule, has now headed off overseas to pursue some vet (and non-vet) adventures.

We also farewelled Carol Adams after 12 years with us at Clutha Vets. Carol started as a vet tech, back in the day when techs were much less well utilised than they are now, and played an important part in establishing the roles and responsibilities of the vet tech. This gave her a great grounding for a move into an admin role in Milton, where she has been running a tight ship on the farm side of things for the many years, making sure our clients got the vet they need, at the right place, at the right time.

Stepping in to Carol's big shoes is Donna Tisdall, whose voice you will now hear when you ring the Milton clinic. You may also hear Hannah Ashton, who has taken on a role combining vet teching and vet nursing at Milton.

## How hot is too hot?

“Cold”, wet cows get more than their fair share of media coverage in the winter, but we know that with a rumen full of feed and a large growing calf inside, cows are able to keep themselves pretty warm in most weather. But what about the other end of the scale? With a rumen full of feed and an udder working hard to produce milk, how can cows keep cool when the weather gets hot?

Fonterra suppliers who are seeking the Co-operative Difference payment, are required to develop and implement an Animal Wellbeing Plan. One of the AWP's focus areas is Heat Mitigation Strategies. Weather like we have had in the last few weeks demonstrates the relevance of this, not only for animal wellbeing, but also for milk production. Strategies that can be used to help cows cope with the heat include:

- Changing milking times to avoid crowding cattle onto the yard at the hottest times
- Bringing cows to the shed in smaller groups, so they have room to spread out
- Checking troughs and water lines daily—can every cow get enough to drink?
- Providing extra troughs / water on the exit race after milking
- Longer term, developing a 2 / 5 / 10 year tree planting plan to ensure shade in every paddock, on races, and on the yard



### **What are the collars telling us?**

People using cow collars, and similar technologies, get good information about the likely pregnancy status of their cows. This is based on the fact that cows stop cycling when they get pregnant, and the collars detect they are no longer going through the 21-day cycle of high activity / low rumination.

However we believe that rectal pregnancy testing remains the gold standard— you can't deny a 70 day foetus with a beating heart, seen on the ultrasound screen; or a uterus that palpates as empty all the way from one ovary to the other. Our pregnancy testing also often picks up pregnancies that look to be slipping, disease in the uterus, or twins—all things that are unlikely to show up on the tech data. Also, it is not uncommon for us to find a cow that has had a return heat after she has conceived to an earlier AI— based on the collar data, these animals may still be in winter mode and not adequately transitioned when they calve earlier than expected. Or, a “false” heat in a pregnant cow, after mating has finished, may lead to her being mistakenly culled as an empty.

So, while the way of the future may well include smart technology to reduce some of the more tedious aspects of farming, for now we recommend still using an old-fashioned preg test to provide the highest quality information to inform your drying off, wintering and culling decisions.

### **What is making cows lame?**

We are seeing some quite large lame cow mobs around the district at the moment. Not only are they a cause for frustration, but the production and animal welfare costs can also be significant. Clearly avoiding lameness is a much better option than managing cows that have gone lame.

Clutha Vets have a couple of options to help you out with cow lameness. We can come and treat cows that you are struggling to get to yourself. But more importantly, we are holding a practical workshop on lameness prevention and treatment on farm in Clydevale on 15 February; and also don't forget that we have a number of trained “Healthy Hoof” providers. HH is a DairyNZ programme, designed to offer individualised support, advice and training to get on top of lame cows. If you are interested in any of these services, please get in touch with the clinic.

### **Thiamine**

Every year around now, we see a few cases of thiamine deficiency in calves. Thiamine is Vitamin B1—not to be confused with Vit B12 (the appetite stimulant). Thiamine is usually made by the bugs in the developing rumen, but a number of things can throw those bugs off track, leading to a deficiency. Symptoms are usually seen in just one or two animals and are described as “nervous signs” - tremors, depression, aimless wandering, wobbly on their feet; perhaps seizures and blindness; or possibly even found dead.

How else do we know a calf has B1 deficiency? It's brain glows under a UV light! If appropriate treatment is undertaken promptly, most animals can be turned around; but more important is to protect the rest of the mob by changing from lush pasture (who has lush pasture for calves at the moment?) to more mature with hay or straw.



### **Things to do in February**

- Weigh the calves, to ensure weight gains are maintained on dry feed. Supplements may be required
- Maintain regular worm drenching of calves (we still have a few hams to give away—perfect now school lunches are back on!).
- Lepto vaccinations—calves, yearlings and herd
- Condition score the herd, and adjust feeding and milking strategies for light cows
- Pregnancy testing, to allow early dry off or culls
- Vet certs for bulls or cows heading to the works with any abnormality (within a few days of them going)
- Book in for our lame cow workshop on 15 March
- Get all of your RVM paperwork in order for shed checks—this will also be necessary for upcoming Autumn Consults and DCT discussions