

CUD

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



November 2022

Clinic News

The dairy cattle team is now in the middle of our busiest period—we are well into mating programmes and bull testing, while also tidying up the last of the calf debudding, metrichecking and trace element testing. A few lame cows are popping up around the place, and just for fun, there are still some calvings too (though mostly for beef farmers, now).

Later this month, we will be farewelling Anene du Plessis, who has been part of the Milton vet team for the last couple of years. Anene is heading off to a job at research animal facility at the University of Otago, and we wish her well. We have worked hard to secure some locum vets to help out over the next few busy months, until our new permanent appointment vets arrive. You may meet Erin Noonan or Jen Still on farm. You will also see more of Sam Howarth and Anna Burrell working from Milton – they have both moved north from Balclutha, and we are glad to have been able to keep them as part of our team by fitting them in at the northern end of the practice.

We have said farewell to Brad Storer and Marc McElrea, as their seasonal employment comes to an end and they pick up their pipettes for another round of AI; and we will also be saying farewell to Dana Fleming, who has been an important part of the Milton tech team since 2017. Thanks for all those calf debuds, metrichecks, vaccinations and heifer teatseals guys, along with the myriad other “orphan jobs” you have done around the place to keep the vets on track and the practice running smoothly.

A new face on the team is Glenn Davidson – he had an after school job at Clutha Vets “a few years ago” and as the wheel turns full circle we welcome him back to a position based primarily in Milton retail.

News from the Board of Directors

Clutha Vets is a farmer owned co-operative, and you, the farmers are its members and owners. The AGM for the Association will be held at the Balclutha Clinic on Tuesday 22 November. There are several board vacancies and this year an election will be required to choose amongst the nominees. Please come along to support the club.

One of the things the directors are responsible for is the distribution of any operating surplus. This can be re-invested in practice infrastructure, with the aim of providing top quality equipment for the care of your animals, and an attractive environment to attract and retain the best staff. Often, donations and sponsorship are made to community groups (eg local sports clubs, or the Clutha Vets Balclutha Dog Park), and usually some can be paid to members as additional discount on the year’s spend. This year \$550,000 was paid in additional members’ discount, and you should have seen your additional discount credited to your account on last month’s statement.

The board have also purchased AEDs for each of our clinics. The sooner these “heart-restarters” can be used, the better their chance of saving a life, so having them readily available is much better than waiting for an ambulance to arrive. This is another community service provided by your vet club, though we hope never to have to use them.

Mating checklist

This year we have tried something a bit new with our mating advice — rather than the familiar paper-based info, we have been putting regular reminders on our Clutha Vets Dairy FaceBook page, for each of the smaller (but very important) tasks that need to be done to get your ducks in a row for mating. Have you seen them?

The key thing to be doing now, is checking your submission and non-return rates. To have 90% of your cows submitted in the first three weeks, you need to put up just over 4% of the herd *every day*. If you can achieve 60% conception rate in these, you'll have 54% in calf in the first three weeks, and be on track to the target of 79% in six weeks.

And also, as you make your way through AI, make sure your bulls are sorted—enough of them, well-grown and in good health. Ideally the bulls you get will be semen-tested for fertility—there are some things you just can't tell by looking at them in a pen, or even from observing them mating. If you are putting up less than 4% per day (28% in the first week, 56% by the end of the second), please give us a call to discuss options for speeding things up a bit.

What are the collars telling us?

We have seen just how good cow monitoring collars, and other similar technologies, can be at detecting cows on heat. By monitoring rumination rate and cow activity, they can determine just when a heat begins and give guidance to the best time for insemination.

In fact, these subtle signs can be more accurate than tail paint rubbed off and pin bones rubbed raw. We hear many stories of cows inseminated on their first “silent” heat that have no obvious signs that they are on, but that hold to that service. Or cows with an irregular interval that hold to the service the collar suggests is there, despite the farmer's instinct.

So not only do the collars take away the hassle and labour of heat detection presenting you with a list each milking of cows to be drafted for AI, they can also increase the accuracy of heat detection in your herd and help you achieve a better mating result.

Things to do in November

- Monitor submission rates—to achieve 90% submission in the first three weeks of mating, you need to be submitting more than 4% of the herd every day.
- Treatment of non-cycling cows if submission rates are below target.
- Tidy up the tail end of metrichecking—late calvers are the ones who have the most work to do getting back in calf early, so don't neglect them!
- Monitor bull activity and capability over the heifers.
- Final round of calf debudding, and weaning based on target weights. Worm (and coccidia) drench once they have been out on grass more than three weeks.
- Use herd test records to make a clear strategy for mastitis management for the rest of the season.



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