November 2024

CLUTHA V·E·T·S Animal Health Centre

DAIRY NEWSLETTER

Life after calving

CLINIC NEWS

As I write this clinic update, it feels a bit like déjà vu—I could use the same introduction from last time - From time to time, a staff member who has been a core part of Clutha Vets decides to hang up their vetting boots and stethoscope, marking the end of an era.

After over 40 years of dedicated service, Sid Taylor has made that decision, opting to focus on perfecting his golf swing and enjoy some well-earned R&R. We're announcing this after his departure, as Sid wanted to step away quietly. Thank you to all the clients who attended his farewell—it was heartwarming to see the impact he's had across so many farms in the Milton/Taieri area.

Sid has always been the epitome of a vocational vet, with a sharp clinical mind and a tireless work ethic. He consistently went above and beyond for farmers and fellow vets, and his dedication to solving cases never wavered. Even after leaving a farm, Sid would continue thinking through the details and striving for better solutions.

I've known Sid since 2000, when I worked at Otautau Vets in Western Southland. Sid truly reshaped my view of veterinary practice—his passion for the job, commitment to excellence, and humility were inspiring. He was always ready to mentor younger vets, providing advice, discussing cases, and balancing the latest innovations with practical experience.

Sid joined Clutha Vets in 2009 and became a key part of the Milton clinic, especially for our Taieri Dairy clients. He also played a crucial role in establishing the Executive Management Group (EMG) in 2010, which has been vital in supporting and retaining experienced vets at Clutha Vets.

CLINIC NEWS CONT.

Sid's true passion has always been ruminant nutrition. His deep understanding of the system and its interconnections, along with his practical advice, has helped countless farmers improve their operations.

Sid also combined exceptional veterinary skills with strong business acumen, a rare and valuable combination that benefited both the vet club and the farmers he worked with. Beyond his professional expertise, he genuinely cared for those around him, always checking in with, "Are you happy?" and offering thoughtful advice from others' perspectives.

One farmer shared a story that captures Sid's dedication: "He came to see a cow of mine in cold, wet, hailing weather. He predicted the cow would die within the hour and said, 'I can come back in an hour and a half to do a post-mortem.' Sure enough, Sid was right. He returned in the freezing weather, did the PM, and proved his diagnosis. It would have been easy to skip the follow-up, but he didn't. That's the kind of vet Sid was."

Sid, thank you for everything you've done. Your contributions to Clutha Vets, your colleagues, and the farming community are immeasurable. We wish you all the best in this next chapter of your life.

VETERINARY ADVICE

These next pages deliver some knowledge from us to you on some key animal health issues we've seen over the spring time and through the next period.

>>> SPRING CLEAN YOUR UNMATED COWS

Many farms are nearing the end of their first round of AI, and hopefully, they've met the target of having 90% or more of the herd submitted within the three-week window. However, even if this goal is achieved, there can still be a significant number of unmated cows. For instance, in a 500-cow herd with 90% submission, that still leaves 50 cows that haven't been mated yet. Now is the time to plan how to manage these cows.

In the past, we've offered solutions like coming in to CIDR the unmated cows, or using a scanner to assess their ovaries to determine which cows truly need a CIDR and which could be treated with just a dose of PG. This year, we've had great success with a slightly different approach: we start by giving PG to all cows that haven't yet cycled, followed by a CIDR about five days later for any cows still not in estrus. The advantages of this method over using blanket CIDRs are twofold: PG is more cost-effective, and it avoids the 10-day delay caused by a CIDR. Compared to scanning, it's also has twofold advantages, we save the cost of the scan, and guarantee that every cow will be mated by the end of the process. When we've used scanning and PGs in the past, we've typically see an 85% response rate, which still leaves some unmated cows—a frustrating outcome for everyone involved.

An example of how this looks is in the table below.

Wednesday 20th	Thursday - Monday	Monday 25th after AI	Monday 2nd	Wednesday 4th	Thursday 5th
PG unmated cows	AI any cows that cycle	CIDRs in for cows still unmated	CIDRs out	GnRH given	Fixed time AI

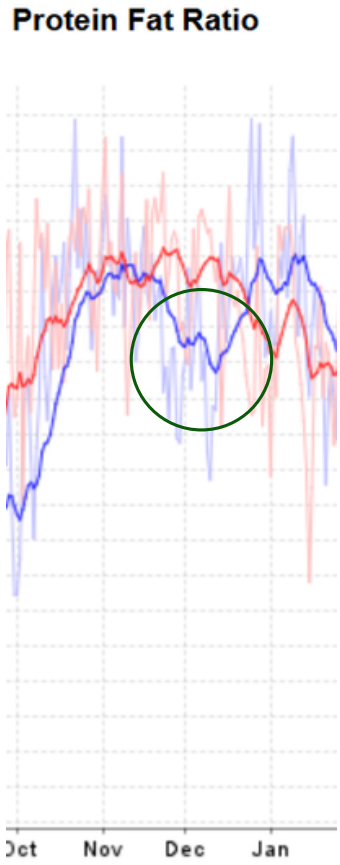
VETERINARY ADVICE

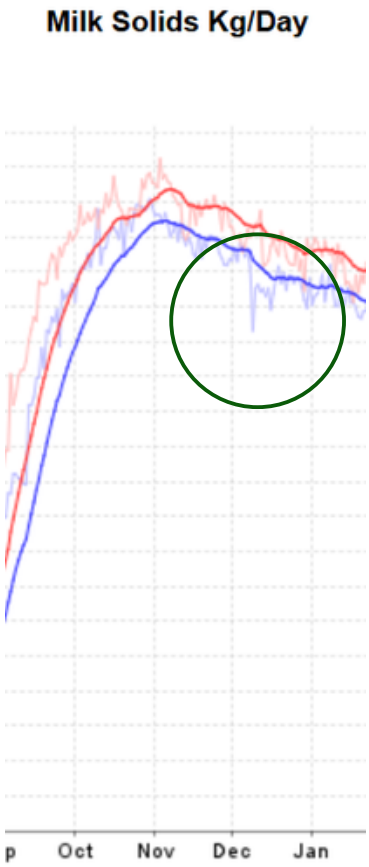
>>> FEEDING FOR SUCCESS OVER MATING

Ever wondered why cows are easier to get pregnant at the start of mating than at the end? Is it the cows, or something else?

In NZ's seasonal system, we start mating when grass is at its best—plenty of growth and energy in the feed. However, by the end of mating, the grass quality declines, with plants going to seed and feed becoming drier and lower in nutrients. This drop in feed quality can lead to poorer submissions and conception rates in the final month of mating.

You may see this in your milk curve as a decline in milk solids and a lower protein-to-fat ratio. The graphs below (faint blue lines) from one farm show this drop in both production and protein:fat ratio during December (highlighted in green circles).





What can we do?

- Maintain both pasture quality and quantity—this isn't always easy at that time of year.
- Make baleage from overgrown paddocks instead of forcing cows to eat them.
- Use post-mowing, not pre-mowing, for rank paddocks.
- Don't take too much area for silage at once to avoid a feed shortage later.
- Monitor milk curves, growth rates, and residuals. Adjust things on farm if needed.

VETERINARY ADVICE

>>> BULL SELECTION

Fit

- Strong, healthy, well grown (85% mature weight at 2yrs), BCS 4.5-5.5 and walking easily and freely. Any doubt here and common sense suggests that the bull should be removed immediately and replaced.
- LOOK FOR LAMENESS ESPECIALLY AND ACT!

Fertile

- Ensure bulls are vaccinated for BVD + lepto, and tested negative for BVD. Bulls that are carriers for BVD will cause havoc with your mating causing early embryonic loss, or complete failure of conception.
- Multimin can also be given (1ml/100kg), ideally 12 weeks before joining the herd.
- Fever within 60 days of mating period can lead to infertility/ low sperm numbers. Ensure the scrotum is of appropriate size. Min: 28cm for a yearling jersey bull and >31cm for all other breeds. Visualise the prepuce and penis to ensure no obvious deformities.

Appropriate for your stock

- Use bulls that are likely to minimise the number of calvings requiring assistance. Select bulls of similar size to the cows or heifers to be mated. If bulls are substantially heavier than the cows or heifers (e.g. >100kg heavier) then injuries to both bulls and cows are more likely. Observe bulls serving tall cows; ensure they are able to serve correctly. Also observe larger bulls serving cows. If the cows collapse under the weight, find lighter bulls.

Able

- Observe all bulls mating over the first cycle, identify any libido, mounting or intromission problems. This is important—if in doubt, flick him out!
- Select bulls of similar size and age and from the same mob to reduce fighting when they are in the herd. Mix them together prior to the breeding season.

The Bull:Cow Ratio

- Having enough bulls when cows are likely to be on heat is important in ensuring good reproductive performance. The number of bulls required will depend on the number of cows or yearling heifers likely to come on heat while the bulls are with the group.
  - At least 1 : 30 cows in the herd at any one time. In large operations with two herds, circulate the bulls between herds and rest one group of three with the lame/sick/penicillin mob.
  - If you are using yearlings drop the ratio to 1 : 20. Yes, older bulls are better.
  - Always build in spare capacity. Bulls have a high attrition rate—EXPECT IT!
  - Plan for extra bull power if using synchrony programmes. Discuss this with us. It may mean restarting AB for a short period to give the bulls a hand.

VETERINARY ADVICE

>>> WHEN LAMENESS GETS LAMER – JOINT INFECTIONS

This spring's heavy rainfall has led to a significant rise in lameness among cows across Clutha. The combination of deteriorating muddy tracks, softened hooves due to the wet conditions, post-calving inflammation, and reduced fat pad cushioning, has created a challenging situation for farmers to manage. The most common lameness seen has been White Line Disease. This disease occurs when walking irritates the white line, causing the hoof wall to separate from the sole. The gap collects debris, leading to further damage and infection. Over time, the infection can spread to the foot, tendons, and joints, making the lameness worse. Swelling often appears at the heel bulb and can spread around the dew claws. In severe cases, the infected claw may point upward as the tendon attachment to the toe bone breaks down.

A severely infected joint from whiteline disease

Joint infections cause significant pain and lameness. For welfare and production reasons, prevention is best. Drafting out lame cows early, paring out whiteline disease early, and administering anti-inflammatories such as ketomax and rheumocam goes a long way.

For those cows that do get joint infections, medical treatment can be frustrating. Joints have lower blood supply than other parts of the body. Because antibiotics are carried via the bloodstream, this makes it challenging for getting a sufficient concentration into the joint to cure the infection. To combat this, vets can prescribe a week-long course of penicillin (bovipen, propercillin, depocillin) at an off-label [WS1] high dose. Another option, especially if the heel bulb swelling is caught early, is a one-off injection of Calefur[WS2] . This antibiotic is injected into the blood vessels of the leg, after a tourniquet has been applied, which stops the Calefur draining away quickly.

Amputation of the infected claw is another way to treat severe foot infections, especially when antibiotics haven't worked or the infection is spreading. The procedure involves applying a tourniquet, injecting a local anesthetic into the veins, and using piano wire to remove the claw. Afterward, a pressure bandage is applied, along with antibiotics and anti-inflammatory medication to aid recovery.

The operation takes about 30 minutes. The first bandage stays on for 2 days to a week, and the vet often returns to reapply it. The second bandage is usually left on for about 2 weeks. By then, the wound is often healed enough to go without a bandage, although a third one may be needed in some cases.

If you have any questions about joint infections or lameness in general, please feel welcome to get in contact with one of our vets.

Happier cow post successful claw amputation

VETERINARY ADVICE

>>> SALMONELLA

We've had a few confirmed Salmonella cases in cattle this year, mostly presenting as sick cows with severe dysentery (bloody diarrhoea). This is not unusual – we see Salmonella cases most years and have had some severe outbreaks affecting both calves and adult cows in recent times. However, the wet conditions in the Spring and additional stress on the cows (lameness, nutritional etc) would be expected to increase the risk.

Salmonella is a bacteria, spread by healthy carrier animals. Infected material (faeces, aborted material) can be further spread by scavenging animals/birds. Salmonella can survive several months in ideal conditions (wet paddocks). Outbreaks can happen when exposure to Salmonella occurs at the same time as stress (calving, bad weather, transport etc) and a change in feed type or quality. There may be other risk factors present, including in-shed feeding and type of Magnesium supplementation.

The main Salmonella strains we deal with in cattle in NZ are Typhimurium & Bovismorbificans, which both affect the gut (enteritis), and Brandenburg, which mainly causes abortions. All 3 strains can cause outbreaks and death. Salmonella can also cause severe illness in humans. Fortunately all 3 strains are included in the vaccine Salvexin-B.

Clutha Vets strongly recommend vaccination of all adult dairy cows. The vaccine is relatively cheap (about $1 per dose) and effective. Although vaccination will not necessarily eliminate clinical disease, it will help drastically reduce the severity. Vaccination involves 2 shots in the first year, at least 4 weeks apart. An annual booster is required for ongoing protection. The best time to vaccinate is in the autumn, approaching dry off, or pre-calving. This will maximise antibody levels in the colostrum, providing valuable protection to your calves.

Please get in touch if you have had any suspicious cases, or if you are considering vaccinating anyway.

>>> WHEN ITS NOT SALMONELLA

Just a reminder that not all cases of cows with diarrhoea are salmonella. Some things that also cause scours in adult dairy cattle include:

- Johne's disease
- Too much magnesium
- Dietary scours i.e. too much water and protein in the grass
- Other sporadic bacteria
- Worms (usually only in in young cows)

If you have a sick cow with scours, especially if they aren't getting better on antibiotics, it's a good idea to get us out and get an actual diagnosis.

VETERINARY ADVICE

>>> COCCIDIA IN CALVES

·What is Coccidia?

Coccidia are gut parasites that affect calves. Severe cases cause bloody or mucousy diarrhea, straining, and dehydration, while milder cases result in an "ill-thrifty" appearance, or just reduced growth rates.

·Where is it found?

Coccidia oocysts are typically found in wet, muddy areas of paddocks or calf sheds. After ingestion, they develop into adult coccidia over a few weeks, leading to disease.

·When does it occur?

Calves as young as 4 weeks can be affected, but it's most common in 3-8 month-olds, particularly during stressful events like weaning, transport, or diet changes. Calf meals with coccidiostats prevent coccidia growth, but calves must eat enough (1-2kg/day) for it to be effective. When meal intake drops or stops, an outbreak can occur 3-4 weeks later.

·Why treat with a coccidiocide?

Coccidiocides like Turbo Initial prevent oocysts from developing into adult coccidia, reducing the risk of clinical coccidiosis after weaning.

·How to use Turbo Initial?

Treat calves 7-10 days before you remove meal to prevent outbreaks. This is a one off treatment and then you can follow up with normal parasite drenching 4 weeks later.