

## PINKEYE IN CATTLE

Pinkeye in cattle is a painful & highly infectious disease, which can reduce growth rates and severely disrupt management. It will cause temporary blindness in many animals and permanent blindness in some. In a serious outbreak, a high percentage of the mob can be affected.



The hot summer months are generally the worst time of the year for pinkeye. Unusually, we saw quite a lot of pinkeye in late spring due to those horrible winds drying everything out but generally it is later in summer.

The main cause in cattle is a bacterium called *Moraxella bovis* (compared to a chlamydial cause in sheep). Young cattle are particularly vulnerable, and there are a number of seasonal environmental and management factors that can predispose your cattle to a pinkeye outbreak. These include physical irritants such as wind, dust and pollen, strong UV light, nuisance fly, humid weather, thistles or other stalky vegetation, and feeding of hay. Bought in stock can introduce infection, while high stocking density can increase spread and poor nutrition can reduce the immune response to infection.

Damage to the eye often allows the bacteria in and then you get the characteristic symptoms of Pink eye. The first signs will be weepy eyes and an aversion to strong light. As the disease progresses the conjunctiva become red and inflamed and the eye becomes cloudy (leading to the term "Pink eye").

Pink eye is an animal welfare issue, causing prolonged and serious pain. An outbreak can lead to significant economic and production losses through depressed growth rates, loss of milk production, possible culls and disruption to seasonal grazing management. On top of that are the actual treatment costs of ointments and antibiotics. When dealing with a Pinkeye outbreak it is important to act quickly. This is in the interests of animal welfare, to minimise spread and to reduce production losses. The sooner you recognise it and treat it the more likely you are to have a successful outcome.

Consult us about treatments - most cases respond well to a course of pink eye ointment, some may require further antibiotics and some might even require surgery to save a badly damaged eye.

Note that bringing cattle into the yards for treatment can actually help spread the disease through exposure to dust and the close proximity of other animals.

Ideally, animals treated with antibiotics should be put out into clean pasture and left to recover at low stocking densities. Often however, by the time you realise you have an outbreak and not just a one off case, the disease will be well spread throughout the herd and it is going to be difficult if not impossible to spread infected cattle out at low stocking rates all over the farm.

In terms of prevention, there is no single action that will completely prevent the disease. A vaccine is available, but is not particularly effective once an outbreak is established. If you suffer historically from pinkeye then a vaccination 3-6 weeks before the usual time an outbreak occurs is very effective. Other measures are recommended as follows:

- Attempt to minimise exposure to dry, dusty conditions
- Provide access to shelter from strong light
- Control nuisance fly
- Manage pasture to help prevent physical eye damage from thistle and similar plants
- Minimise close contact between cattle
- Maintain good stock condition



### Calf vaccinations due now!!

Give Lisa a call to book 1st and 2nd Lepto & BVD vaccinations.



### Congratulations

to **Duncan Menzies** winner of the \$1,000 grocery voucher



### Introducing James

Hi. I'm James Bruce (mostly known as 'Brucey') from the mighty Manawatu. I grew up on a sheep and beef farm on the Manawatu flats,

surrounded by a sea of dairying. I finished my veterinary studies at the end of last year and have been keen to come to the 'Naki' since I was a young buck.

Outside of work I enjoy surfing, rugby, touch, indoor netball, squash, 'can-a-hole' golf and fishing.

I look forward to meeting you all.



Team members participating in the Eltham & Districts 125 year Jubilee parade



### February 2010

As luck would have it there isn't much room for my editorial this month so I've been told I can't blather on about rugby and cricket like I usually do. That's probably a good thing because I couldn't think of anything intelligent to say anyway (so what's new I hear you ask).

Welcome to 2010. I hope you had a nice Christmas/New Year Break with family and friends and are now looking forward to a more positive 2010 than we had in 2009. Most of our clinic news is in other parts of the newsletter this month and you will see that there is a fair bit happening in the first 3<sup>rd</sup> of this year within our team. We will be sad to see Nina and Andy leave and wish them both all the best in the years to come. Andy doesn't go until April so we will do a proper goodbye to him then.

I can't do this bit however without mentioning our much loved 'Regional Manager' in Kaponga, Richard who lost his lovely wife Liz to cancer a couple of weeks ago. It's been a rough couple of years for the Bartleys and we extend our deepest sympathies to Richard and his family: Sarah, Barts & Kate + Lisa & Shayne & the little ones. Liz was a wonderful lady and will be sadly missed. *Al*

### E-mail reminder

It seems you folks change e-mail addresses like some of us change our undies; i.e. all the bloody time! If you are not getting weekly spore count e-mails you may have changed your address from xtra to farmside or vice versa. If so please e-mail me at [al@elthamvetservice.co.nz](mailto:al@elthamvetservice.co.nz) and I will make the required adjustment and put you back on my list. If you wish to be on my mailing list please flick me a message.

### Comings and Goings

Quite a lot is happening around the clinic for the first few months of this year. As already mentioned Polly will be away at Massey as Practitioner in Residence. Lindsay will be going back to part-time until we get busy again with scanning and will be here Monday through Wednesday each week. We have our new vet James Bruce on board (see his introduction elsewhere in this newsletter) and our new receptionist, Sue Morresey starting in February (we will do a proper intro for Sue in our next newsletter).

We also say goodbye to two highly valued members of our team over the next month or two:

Nina Bloemen will be leaving us in mid-Feb to have her baby. Nina has been with us for 10 years so it will be quite strange not to hear her answering the phone or sending us on calls over the RT. Best of luck with the family Nina; we will miss you.

And finally our resident Scotsman, Andy Aitken is leaving us in April after 6 years here. Of course it's all because of a woman back in Edinburgh (and to think I had all those ladies looking for a nice NZ girl for him and you let me down!). It's hard to believe it's been 6 years Andy; we really will miss you and your bag-pipe practice down in surgery. Best of luck to you and Emma. We hope it goes well and perhaps we may see you both back here in years to come. I'm keeping your position open just in case!



### Clinic & Farm Supplies

Railway Street, Eltham  
Ph. (06) 764 8196

[www.elthamvetservice.co.nz](http://www.elthamvetservice.co.nz)

### Trading Depot

Hollard Engineering,  
Victoria Street, Kaponga

Ph. (06) 764 6686

J Larkin 0274 482 585

### Veterinarians

Alistair McDougall BVSc - CEO

Giles Gilling BVSc BSc MRCVS

Andrew Weir BVSc

Jim Robins BVSc, BSc, DipPharm

Polly Otterson BVSc, MSc, MRCVS

Andy Aitken BVM&S, MRCVS

Teresa Carr BVSc

Adrian Clark BVSc

Linley Gilling BVSc

Lindsay Lash BVSc

James Bruce BVSc

### Office

Joan Hughes John Larkin BBS

Nina Bloemen Lisa Goldsworthy

Jill Watson Frank Suter

### Polly does a "Dan Carter"

No she's not going off to France to play rugby, but Polly will be away from the clinic for 2 months this autumn. She has been accepted as the "Practitioner in Residence" at Massey University for this year.

Don't panic; she's not leaving us.

It's just a 'sabbatical' like Dan Carter had, although she won't be earning \$500,000 and her achilles tendon shouldn't be at risk either.

One of the problems they have at Vet School is that most of the lecturers have been away from practice for many years. This removal from the 'real world' can sometimes mean that the message that students get, while being correct in theory, is not always that practical in the field. For that reason Massey invites an experienced rural vet to spend a couple of months with them each year helping teach final year students with a 'real world' view of practice. This includes hands on stuff, a few lectures and more importantly a chance for students to hear from a vet in practice about what it's really like when they are unleashed on the unsuspecting public at the end of their 5<sup>th</sup> year. It's also a chance for that vet to come away with some new ideas, take a break from the rigours of rural practice and hopefully return refreshed and ready to impart all this new knowledge on the rest of us. It also gives us the opportunity to 'sell' Eltham Vets as an option for new graduates when they leave Massey. It's not a holiday, but as they say a change is as good as a rest sometimes. We wish Polly well and we are sure she will bring great credit to herself and this practice while she's there.



## FACIAL ECZEMA REFRESHER

With the weather outlook for the rest of summer not that flash it's hard to imagine the FE will be a big player in our region this year. However we have been caught out before so here is a quick 'refresher' for you on the basics of FE.

### The Problem:

During periods of warm humid weather a fungus called 'sporidesmin' builds up in pasture. When eaten this toxin damages the liver, which in turn results in the build up of waste products that circulate around the body and react to sunlight resulting in the classic signs of facial eczema. FE can be very severe and may kill animals. Usually these signs are quite visual but once they are obvious the animal is already severely affected.

### Signs:

- Marked drop in milk production
- Restlessness at milking time (kicking off cups etc)
- Actively seeking shade
- Licking of the udder
- Obvious redness ("sunburn") of affected areas, particularly white areas, inside hind legs, udder and teats, tongue, lip margins and vulva.
- Dramatic peeling of 'dead' skin from affected areas

### Likely toxic conditions:

- Prolonged periods of warm humid weather
- High humidity
- Light rain or heavy dews in conjunction with grass minimum temperatures above 12-13 degrees C.
- North facing sheltered paddocks, under hedges, etc are generally the most likely to have high spore counts

### Risk levels:

Spore counting is still the best way to get a handle on likely risk. It is highly variable between paddocks but as a guide:

- Low risk: < 20,000
- Slight: 20,000 – 35,000  
(start water treatment once get to 20,000 if not already)
- Moderate: 35,000 – 70,000  
(if drenching this is when you would generally start)
- High: > 70,000

### Care for affected stock:

- Dry off milking cows
- Make shade readily available
- Treat infected skin lesions
- Access to plenty of quality feed and water
- B vitamin injections, zinc cream for affected areas and 'Eczema Oils' or 'Manderson's Mix' to aid recovery
- Seek veterinary advice

### Management and Prevention Tips:

Make early preparations (around here that means starting to make plans in January usually).

Spore count regularly to find out what the situation is on your property and where the most dangerous paddocks are (regional monitor farm counts are at best a trend indicator for the region).

Never graze stock into the base level of pastures. The fungus grows on the litter at the base of the plant and spores are concentrated there (watch out for re-growth paddocks after hay and silage making).

### Prevention Options:

**Fungicidal Sprays** – they certainly work but timing is an issue and around here where FE is sporadic, it might be hard to justify cost. (In the Waikato where FE seems to occur every year, it would just about be a no-brainer). If you were planning on using them they need to be applied before spore counts rise so you would be applying them now

**Zinc**. Still the most workable and cost-effective choice for this part of the world. There are various ways to supplement zinc depending on your situation:

**Water treatment** - as this is not a direct method you would need to start adding zinc to the water supply in small amounts early (i.e. before spore counts get high and so that cows get used to the taste). Effective in low to moderate conditions; less effective once counts get to danger levels

**Drenching**- individual drenching is the method of choice once spore counts get high because then you know the cows are actually getting the required dose for protection. Not possible in some situations depending on your shed and so on

**Zinc boluses** – very useful option for stock away grazing, young stock and so on. At least two versions available with protection of about 4-5 weeks. Probably not cost-effective in lactating animals due to their size and therefore cost of treatment.

For all your zinc requirements and options our Trading Manager, John Larkin, is the man to talk to.



## Exporting Heifers?

Please let us know before we vaccinate them!



In our last newsletter we sent the form we send every year regarding your vaccination requirements for the season. This is just another reminder that if you have any intention to export heifers to China or Mexico we cannot vaccinate them against IBR (otherwise known as catarrh). I have no idea why, but it's just the way it is. IBR is a component in our routine BVD vaccine 'Viracare'. We use Viracare because it gives good protection for calves away grazing against BVD and IBR/Catarrh and it is cheaper than the stand-alone BVD vaccines (previously Bovillis BVD, now Pregsure) we use in herds that have BVD issues.

IBR, while not as dramatic as BVD, is an issue for animals and as well as the 'catarrh' that you see occasionally it can also cause reproductive problems if heifers pick it up around mating, which is why we routinely use Viracare to give them that added protection.

So, if you think you might be exporting this season's calves next year when they are heifers, please tell us and we will either leave them unvaccinated (not recommended) or vaccinate them with Pregsure instead to protect them against BVD when away grazing this season.

Lisa will prompt you when she rings to make the first booking but remember if you don't tell us, we will continue to use Viracare.

## Ryegrass Staggers

As pastures begin to dry out and get a bit long and 'stalky' it is about this time of year we start to see our first cases of ryegrass staggers. The nervous symptoms seen with ryegrass staggers are pretty obvious and can be quite spectacular, especially when yarding calves for vaccinations or drenching. Symptoms range from apparent nervousness, jumping when excited and tremors to falling over. Death is not a common outcome except indirectly through misadventure such as falling over a bank or drowning in a water trough. Animals still tend to eat and drink as normal.

Toxins produced by a fungus that grows inside Perennial ryegrass causes ryegrass staggers. The fungus also produces another chemical that protects the grass from Argentine stem weevil and increases dry matter production by 30-40% so it's not all bad. The toxins that cause ryegrass staggers are most concentrated in the seed head, and in the older leaves around the base of mature slow growing grass. The worse cases are therefore seen when it's dry and pastures are being grazed low or when there is a lot of seed head around, as we are seeing now. Clinical signs generally show up 7-14 days after eating toxic pasture.

If your animals are showing signs of ryegrass staggers such as stiff gait and incoordination it will help if you don't get them too worked up. The signs tend to become more severe when excited and they may fall over or get caught up in fences if agitated. If possible move animals off affected pasture and/or provide supplements to dilute the toxins and leave them alone as much as you can. Try and move them to an area that is well fenced and free from potential hazards such as cliffs, dams, loose wires etc.

The only product with a treatment claim for ryegrass staggers is Nutrimol. In a crisis treat cows and horses with 100ml daily for 3 days then 50ml a day until tremors stop. 20ml daily can be used as a preventative in risk situations. Calves get 20ml daily for 3 days then 5-10ml daily till tremors stop. 3mls per animal daily in the water can help as a preventative measure for calves. Symptoms can take 2-3 weeks to subside after removal from toxic pasture.

## Thiamine Deficiency in Calves

In the last month we have seen a number of cases of this problem (*otherwise known as Cerebrocortical necrosis or Polioencephalomalacia; see why we call it thiamine deficiency?*), sometimes just a single animal is affected but an outbreak can occur in a mob of calves. Usually it occurs in calves 4 months of age or older, that are well fed and growing rapidly. Signs include staggering, champing of the jaws, frothing at the mouth, blindness and head pressing. This often progresses to the calf going down with rigid forelegs, head and neck bent upwards ('star-gazing') and convulsing.

Thiamine is normally produced in the rumen by bacteria during digestion of feed. Deficiency is due to either insufficient production in the rumen (usually meal feeding with no roughage), destruction by enzymes in the rumen (present in Bracken fern for example) or interference from amprolium (coccidiosis treatment). High sulphur diets are also involved such as molasses, fertilisers, sulphates in drinking water (magnesium or zinc) and some crops (kale, swedes, turnips, rape). Often it is difficult to pinpoint the exact cause.

Thiamine levels can be checked by a blood test in affected calves but due to the time delay and cost it is best to treat first with high doses of Vitamin B1. This is different to the Prolact B12 injections, and is called Duoject B. If caught early the damage to the brain is reversible; if treatment is delayed then there is often some improvement but not complete recovery. If there appears to be an outbreak in a mob of calves then dosing with Biostart Ruminant at 10ml per calf daily for 2 to 3 days may assist in settling down the rumen bacteria. It is also important that other causes of strange behaviour in calves are ruled out such as Ryegrass staggers, Listeria infections, lead poisoning or meningitis.



**POWERBUILT TOOLS** with Merial Ancare products See in-clinic display for details

## Early Dry-Off? Don't forget DCT

It's generally about this time of year that some cows put their hands up (hooves?) to let you know they are struggling and need to be dried off early. This may be due to age, illness or high somatic cell count.

Whatever the reason, once you've decided whether she's worth keeping or not, don't forget to treat her with Dry Cow therapy and/or Teatseal. She's going to be dry for a long time and she won't be eligible for treatment later in the season when the rest of the herd is dried off so you have to make that decision now. Ideally use the longest acting DCT available and for even better long term protection the additional use of a teat sealant should see her well and truly protected until calving.

If you have some cows you are thinking of drying off early and keeping for next season, come and speak to one of our vets about protection over the dry period.

**Please complete (& return) the enclosed Dry Cow Consultation form two weeks before drying-off your herd**

