

ELTHAM VET SERVICES

NEWSLETTER

February 2009

Happy New Year? It's hard to know. The continued unravelling of world financial markets and the corresponding fall in payout to dairy farmers certainly makes for challenging times ahead for everyone. I hope for your sake that your accountant encouraged you to budget conservatively. We have noticed a significant drop off in business since mid-December. At the end of November we were reeling from the massive demand for services through spring and mating and were looking to add another vet to the payroll in anticipation of being even busier next season. Since then Abby has resigned and will leave in March. We will be sorry to see her go as she is developing into an outstanding vet. She has decided that she needs a new challenge in veterinary medicine (near the Mexican border in Texas) so she leaves with our best wishes and thanks for her contribution to this practice in the short time she has been with us. With no-one knocking our doors down looking for a job we were getting a bit worried before Xmas. Since then we had got to the point where, not only were we no longer overly concerned, unless someone outstanding fell into our lap out of the blue we believed we had enough vets to match anticipated falling demand. As luck would have it, just before Xmas we were visited by ex-EDVS Vet Lindsay Lash who is back in Taranaki. It seems he had tired of being a minister (it would be a tough job at the best of times) and had been considering returning to the veterinary profession. I seized on this idea like a dog with a bone and just the other day he came back in to confirm he does want to return to vetting in some capacity (probably part-time at first, then who knows) and with our help wants to resurrect his career here at Eltham. We are delighted of course and now have to go through the formalities of getting him re-registered and admitted back into the profession and then brought up to date with changes since he left. Those of you who remember Lindsay will remember what a great vet he was and how badly he was missed when he left so I'm sure you will join me in welcoming him back with open arms later this year.

Assuming that you intend to cut back on spending, where are you going to start? Far be it from me to advise you in this area (that's what accountants are for) but perhaps I might be permitted to make a couple of suggestions in the area of animal health? First I must remind you of your obligations with regard to animal welfare. Do not ignore sick or lame animals for the sake of a few dollars. Do not 'save up' lame cows until you have a 'batch' of them for us to look at. The lamer a cow gets the more she suffers, the poorer her chances of recovery, not to mention exponential reduction in milk production so the longer you leave her, the more she is going to cost. What about scanning? Most of you are well aware of the value of scanning, especially earlier in the season to detect late cows and so on. Can you afford to cut back there? Perhaps. If you intend inducing late cows, then you have no option but to scan to identify those cows. However, in smaller herds and where you keep very good records, maybe you can get away with 'targeted' scanning of smaller groups rather than the whole herd. If you don't induce then you could argue that you could save money simply by doing the ones you think might be empty. It sounds like many people will be keeping their cows at home this winter to save money so the cost of grazing an empty cow through the winter becomes less relatively speaking. I don't think the larger herds can get away with this due to difficulties that come about through sheer size but whole herd scanning may be an area where you can cut back a bit.

Dry Cow Therapy. You are paid on one thing and one thing only - Milk. Those of you with bulk count issues already know what pain mastitis and grades are to your operation and bottom line. Just to reinforce this message remember that only 4% of your cows may be responsible for 50% of your bulk count but just 5% of your milk. High cell counts do impact on milk production as well as quality and, left undealt with, they threaten to wreck your operation and significantly impact the bottom line. Therefore you cannot afford to cut back on DCT this season, especially if you have been struggling with bulk count issues. We may be able to come up with cheaper DCT alternatives but if we recommend whole herd therapy to you this season it is for a reason. Those of you with few problems in this area can afford to maybe be more selective and treat according to Samm plan thresholds, but don't be tempted to keep high cell count cows when they have already been treated with DCT before; chances of curing these cows are slim at best. **Please complete enclosed form.** If you are running close to grading, about now is the time to start thinking about drying off and treating or culling problem cows. Once volume drops below 10L/cow/day there is an increased risk of bulk grades and even uninfected cows will start to produce milk with a very high SCC when their milk yield drops below 5L/day. So if you are in this category you should be ready to take action from now. Don't cut back on herd tests to save money because again, if you are in the grading risk category, you need that information to save you in the long run. Cutting out herd tests is not a wise place to cut expenditure. I have spoken to a number of clients who have battled high bulk counts this season. I expect to be talking to them again as drying off approaches to implement the next part of the strategies we discussed earlier and in most cases this will involve a good hard look at problem cows, aggressive culling where possible and whole herd dry cow therapy for the rest along with targeted drying off of low producers. This is one crucial area where you should not be cutting back on expenditure.

On a different note, it was quite something to see Barak Obama inaugurated last month. It seems the whole world wants this man to lead and restore America to its rightful place in the world. He certainly looks like the man for a crisis. Whether he is a friend of free trade remains to be seen and with the Europeans seemingly intent on reproducing the butter mountains and milk lakes of the 70's we are in for quite a ride over the next couple of years. Reading the history of the great depression it seems that protectionist moves such as those coming out of Europe and the US went a long way towards triggering that miserable decade so let's hope that some of these people read their history and listen to those who are promoting aggressive and positive responses to the recession rather than a "circle the wagons" approach. As a nation we are better placed than most to trade our way out of a recession (especially if the dollar stays below 50c) but if all our major trading partners start putting big protective walls around their economies then we face real trouble and some long painful years ahead. Good luck for 2009! I suspect we are all going to need it.

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www.elthamvetservice.co.nz
Trading Depot
Hollard Engineering,
Victoria Street, Kaponga
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Pregnancy Testing time is here again

Help us to help you get the most out of your whole herd pregnancy test. We can do empty/pregnant or tell you late cows or give you an aged pregnancy for each cow tested. This latter option will give you maximum information from pregnancy testing which is especially useful where there may be reproductive problems or a high empty rate. Aged testing will take slightly longer so you need to tell office staff when booking this in. You will need to supply a pregnancy test work sheet from MindaPro or Mistro (see separate article on how to get this).

As part of our service we double check any empty cows manually and we can also tell you if these cows are damaged or scarred and not viable for holding over.

If your herd is found to have a problem we can make an appointment for Teresa or Andrew to go over your records and Fertility Focus Report to see which areas should be focused on to improve your herds results. Correct identification of cows is very important for accuracy.

Multiple and missing tags make our jobs difficult and can lead to mistakes. It is advisable to paint empties as well as recording them and in large herds it may be a good idea to tag empties at time of pregnancy testing. It is preferable that the person doing the recording knows the herd and is good with numbers. We pride ourselves on our pregnancy testing accuracy, help us to help you.

Pregnancy Testing Worksheet

To get this report you need to have MindaPro or Mistro (Ambreed). If you have Minda Link you can ring Minda to be sent a free report.

- Go to Reports
- Select Management Reports
- Then Pregnancy testing worksheet
- Select your group & put in the PD date
- Print Report

If your report appears in days, change to weeks

- Click on Tools
- Select Options
- Pregnancy diagnosis on Left
- Then in small box change to weeks not days

To enter the information after pregnancy testing

- Go to Animal Tests
- Select Pregnancy Diagnosis
- Select Group eg. Cows in milk or whole herd
- Select record individual animal diagnosis
- Then start
- Select first cow
- Confirm weeks or change to weeks vet gave you.
- Select next (and so on ...)

Any questions contact Teresa at the clinic

Early Scanning Results

We have done quite a lot of early scans, both on whole herds and to check on the performance of non-cycler treatments. Overall, things are looking positive, with the whole herds being ahead in terms of pregnancy rates at the same time last year. The feed situation through November has been better than the past few years, so this may well be the reason. Anecdotal results from the Waikato are that the in-calf rate there is poor, so there may well become a market for holdovers up there as the season proceeds. Scans on the anoestrous cows have been across the range, but in general the 'Prosync Plus' treatments have been very encouraging, with the in-calf rates to the Cidr in the range of 38%-70%, with the old Cidr program running at 25%-40%. A few herds slipped back into anoestrus, but in general cows kept cycling.

Giles

New research shows high costs of heifer mastitis

A nationwide study currently underway has shown that costs due to this common problem average a total of \$197 for every first case in the season, and \$2020 for the average 340 cow dairy herd. Recent research in NZ has helped understand this common and frustrating problem and provided farmers with some practical methods to control it.

Following on from this research, a series of meetings will be held to provide information about heifer mastitis and mastitis in general to farmers. Vet-researchers from Animal Health Centre Morrinsville, Scott McDougall and Chris Compton will present information from their latest research and practical approaches to controlling the problem. In addition, two international experts in the field of mastitis - Dr Rod Dyson (Australia) & Dr Theo Lam (Holland) will bring their own perspectives to solving mastitis problems from many years of experience of working with individual farmers and their industries. This is a unique opportunity to interact with New Zealand and international mastitis workers, and plenty of time will be available to discuss issues over lunch at the start of the sessions and through the presentations. The farmer meeting in this area will be held 12:00 to 2:30 p.m. on **Wednesday 11th March, Stratford (TET Multi Sports Stadium, 65 Portia St)**. Register your intention to attend by e-mailing AWilson@ahc.co.nz or phoning on 07898236.



Facial Eczema Ahead?

It would be nice to be able to predict what the spore count will be in two months' time but alas we can't. We have started counting on our eight monitor farms (once again many thanks to those kind people) and as usual no trend has yet developed. However, between Xmas and New Year I couldn't believe how humid it got out Bell Block way and if weather like that carried on for a couple of weeks unbroken, it would pretty safe to assume that spore numbers will build rapidly (especially with all that dead litter lying around after hay-making) and we could be in trouble. With that in mind, if you are a water treatment-kind of person it is time to start putting zinc into your water supply at low levels (around ¼ of normal dose) so your stock can get used to the taste before you may have to up the dose to crisis rates. It takes time for water treatment to take effect and if you suddenly dump in zinc at crisis rates your cows will not drink so you really should start now. Young stock can be dosed with either of the zinc boluses on the market but again you need to start before spore counts are too high. Watch for signs of upward movement in spore numbers and be ready to act. If you are into spraying the pasture with one of the various fungicides available again these can be very effective but only if applied before spore numbers rise so realistically you should be looking to spray very soon.

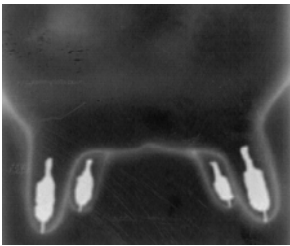
If you are drenching then you generally don't need to start until numbers get above 40,000 but in the meantime you should have a few bags of zinc oxide on hand and make sure your drenching system is working. It doesn't take so long to get rates up to crisis dosages but you still need to build them up over a week or two. If you go straight in with the full dose you can expect to see a few cases of milk fever as cows tip over (so you may also want to make sure you still have a few bags/bottles of calcium and magnesium left over from spring in case you need to treat a cow, and a couple of bags of causmag might not go amiss either). Then there's the effect that zinc has on copper...



COPPER DEPLETION DURING ZINC DOSING FOR FACIAL ECZEMA

One of the problems of dosing cows with high levels of zinc to prevent facial eczema is the effect this has on copper uptake and storage. Herds can be heavily depleted in copper status at the end of zinc dosing, and this is just when their demand for copper is increasing. Uptake of dietary copper tends to decrease over autumn and winter, yet the growing calf demands more and more copper from its dam as pregnancy advances. It is generally recommended **not** to supplement cows with copper sulphate during the facial eczema season. This is because the high levels of zinc are antagonistic to copper in the rumen, so any copper from copper sulphate will be bound up and not absorbed, and also a concern that copper in this form may increase the toxicity of the sporidemin. However, organic forms of copper are largely protected from degradation in the rumen and interference by the high zinc levels, and these forms of copper can be supplemented to cows during the facial eczema period. These “rumen-protected” forms of copper like amino acid, proteinated, and polysaccharide copper complexes, will prevent the severe copper depletion effect of high zinc dosing. Organic copper can be supplemented in feed or via the water. Alternatively, cows can be rapidly boosted with copper at the end of the facial eczema season by copper injections or boluses. But for the animals’ health and well-being it is preferable to maintain a steady copper intake and status all the time, so supplementing with organic copper on a daily basis would be the favoured option.

Long Dry Period? Consider “Teatseal”



If you are drying cows off early for various reasons (or perhaps the whole herd a bit later on) you are faced with a very long dry period. Naturally you will be considering treating them with a long-acting dry cow therapy (DCT) to protect them over this extended period. However, even the longest acting DCT will only ‘protect’ for up to 10 weeks, therefore drying off now leaves your cow unprotected for maybe another one or two months depending on when she is due to calf. There is now plenty of NZ based research to go along with overseas studies to show that treating these cows with DCT **and** Teatseal will significantly reduce the chances of those cows getting mastitis within the first 100 days after calving. Teatseal literally puts a solid barrier to infection into the teat canal and stays there until milked out after calving. This is probably not the best year to be recommending treating cows with two products going into the dry period, but for certain cows and in certain cases, especially very long dry periods, it is something you should seriously consider. Talk to us about this option if drying valuable cows off early this season.

ELECTROCUTION – A Shocking Saga

We have certified more dead cows for insurance purposes this season than in previous years, so it is worthwhile reminding you of what is required. Please do not move the body; we need to see it on site within 24 hours of death. Don’t expect us to put our names to a document which is designed to help you get compensation for a valuable animal if you don’t call us until 2 days after it died. We need to see it while it’s “fresh”. Turn the power off to that section, as it makes the reading of brass tags and examination of the carcass a little less shocking. Contact your insurance company to check what is required – most will only require the certificate from the vet, and this is a legal document; once we sign that document we are the ones with our necks on the line, so we cannot certify historical cases or photographs. In the case of lightning strike this is especially true.



I recall filling in a form in Scotland which asked why I had not performed a post-mortem; the reply was ‘because the light bulb was still in the bull’s mouth’.

Giles

NIL MILK WITHHOLDING ANTIBIOTICS

There are three injectable antibiotics currently available at the clinic. Whilst they are very useful at this time of year so you won’t be sat on the beach realizing that the relief milker doesn’t know about cow No. 78 being full of penicillin, it is worthwhile reviewing their uses.

The biggest seller is **Excenel**, which although it costs so much per bottle that it should glow in the dark, the 10ml dose means that at a \$5 payout, it becomes cost effective over penicillin if the cow is producing over 1.4kgs milk solids per day. We now also stock the Stockguard equivalent **Cefaguard** which comes in handy plastic 30ml bottles, so less wastage and less trauma when the bottle gets broken....

These drugs were originally pneumonia drugs, and are excellent on lung infections as well as uterine infections and salmonella. They are also excellent drugs for treating footrot, where the infection is between the swollen claws, especially early on when the cow is still producing well and you have the advantage of not having to dump the milk. On other foot abscesses they may be less effective.

The other antibiotic that we stock is **Cephalexin**, which is an older drug that is now off-patent and therefore a bit cheaper. This becomes economic at production levels above 1.25kgs. This drug targets footrot, skin and bone, so is of use on all foot problems. Ten years ago there was publicity over milk residues, but this turned out to be most likely due to overdosing. Dose rates are there for a reason...

Remember with all lameness that unless it is obviously footrot, most lame cows do not require antibiotics so it is always in your best interests to lift up the foot and see what’s wrong before just reaching for ‘the white stuff’.

The calculations here assume that penicillin milk is dumped – so where there are calves or pigs to feed, the economics move again.

Giles

BVD Thanks

Just a quick thank you to all of you (well not quite all of you; some had to be nagged) who took the time to go through the BVD questionnaire with me over the phone in the weeks before Christmas. It was good to speak to so many of you and with all the information we collected, Andrew has more than enough numbers to crunch in the months ahead to keep him out of trouble. While he won't be able to put an actual figure on it for a while, it seems clear that BVD does have a major impact on any farm it visits in terms of reproductive loss and loss of production (it seems that an animal persistently infected with the BVD virus will usually be in the bottom 10-20% of the herd in terms of production). It was also interesting to see how the virus makes its way onto most farms. Generally it comes into the herd via an infected bull or when animals (either your own heifers returning or bought in cows) are brought into the herd. It certainly re-enforces the belief that any bull coming onto your farm needs to be tested and vaccinated against BVD before you take possession of it, and the same should apply to any other new animals bought in (in-calf cows or heifers bought at sales for example - easy enough via a blood or milk test). The risk to young stock going away grazing is also clear and it would be fair to say that our recommendations haven't changed much there - any calves going away grazing should ideally be vaccinated before they leave and should probably receive a booster prior to their first mating (generally while they are still away at grazing) when they are around 15 months old. Whether you should continue to vaccinate cows as they get older is less clear (unless we know that you have infected animals (PI's) in the herd) and this is one of the things that Andrew hopes to be able to give us a clearer answer on when this study is completed.

We all look forward to what he will have to tell us when this research project winds up. In the meantime thanks to all of you for your help.

Applications sought - Research Technician

A research technician is sought to undertake on-farm sampling, data entry and recording as part of national dairy herd fertility project. The role includes:

- Liaising with herd owners and other staff to ensure timely and accurate collection of samples and data.
- Being competent in, or willing to learn, techniques such as body condition scoring, weighing, data recording and sampling techniques for milk and blood.
- Undertaking accurate data recording on-farm, retrieving data from Mindapro and other electronic databases and accurately undertaking data entry and validation procedures into access databases and Excel.
- Ensuring effective flow of samples from collection to laboratory submission.
- Being flexible with working hours as seasonal work may require extended hours (including weekend work).
- Being able to communicate effectively with co-operating herd owners, veterinarians and other staff.
- The position is part time for two years in the first instance, and expected to be approx. 700 hours per year.

Qualifications

- A degree in agricultural or biological sciences is preferable.
- Experience, confidence and competence in handling dairy cattle.
- Ability to communicate effectively with herd owners, farm staff, veterinarians and other staff.
- Competence in operating computer software packages including word processing, spreadsheets and databases.
- Have excellent attention to detail.
- The ability to work unsupervised and be able to motivate herd owners and staff to achieve high levels of data recording.
- Have strong time management and planning skills.
- A current driver's licence.

Applications including a covering letter and current CV marked "Research Technician" to be received at Eltham District Vet Services by 20th of February 2009. For further information contact Andrew Weir at Eltham District Vet Services (06 764 8196). Time is short so please contact us immediately with expressions of interest.

Calf Vaccinations

**Calf vaccinations are now due!!!
Please give the girls a call to book
in your calves for both shots of
Lepto and BVD vaccine.**



**Heavy Duty, All-Weather
Backpack with
selected sheep drenches
Call John for free delivery
and/or payment terms**

**Pick up a set of quality Powerbuilt Tools when you use
selected Merial-Ancare products to
treat your
cattle**

