

## FACIAL ECZEMA BASICS

Prevention is the key to minimising production losses from Facial Eczema (FE). Facial eczema is caused by the ingestion of sporidesmin (a toxin) which is found at the base of the grass sward in dead material. Sporidesmin in the animal leads to liver damage which then prevents the normal removal of a plant pigment, phylloerythrin. When the plant pigment is in superficial blood vessels, it reacts with UV light from the sun and causes skin lesions. While the skin lesions are most visible, don't forget about the underlying liver damage.

### Signs that facial eczema may be on your farm:

- Decreased milk production (as much as 50%!)
  - Skin changes, restlessness, shade seeking
  - Head shaking, weight loss
  - Decreased growth rates
  - Reduced lifetime production and reproductive performance

### How to confirm you have a problem?

- Skin lesions in conjunction with high spore counts
- Blood test or post mortem to check for liver damage

### Treating facial eczema:

- Provide shade
- Remove from pasture with likely high spore counts
- Provide clean water and safe feed
- Application of UV light protectant sunscreen
- B vitamin injections
- Drenching with Manderson's Mix or Eczema Oil seems to aid recovery in affected cows

Animals may need a vet visit for secondary bacterial infections and other supportive treatment.

### Risky time periods:

The toxin tends to be present in late summer and autumn, and during periods of warm, light rain. Temperatures ideal for toxin production are hot days (10-30°C) and soil temperatures greater than 12°C at night.

### Prevention is key:

- \* Southern facing hills are safer during risky times as they tend to dry out in the wind.
- \* Monitor spore counts in your area.
- \* Pasture management - lower stocking rates, high pre and post grazing levels (since spores at grass base). Do not top paddocks.
- \* In high risk paddocks, cultivars can be changed to lower risk species such as chicory and red clover.
- \* Fungicides (Mycotak, Sporex, Benlate or Topsin) can reduce spore counts for 4-6 weeks, but must be applied before the anticipated risk period (which can be extremely variable in Taranaki).
- \* Breeding cows for resistance to toxin (more theoretical than practical at this stage; definitely 'doable' in sheep)
- \* Zinc prevention should begin at least 2-3 weeks before spore counts become dangerous.

### Options for zinc provision include:

- Zn oxide drench daily for milkers
- Weekly Zn oxide pasture spray
- Zn sulphate in drinking water (it is not palatable so introduce gradually at low doses)
- Intra-ruminal slow release Zn capsules given about 7-10 days before anticipated rise in spore counts and repeated every 4-6 weeks as needed while risk remains high (timing depends on which product you use)



### On Safari

*A big game hunter went on a safari with his wife and mother-in-law.*

*One morning, while still deep in the jungle, the hunter's wife awoke to find her mother gone.*

*She woke her husband, and they both set off in search of the old woman.*

*In a clearing not far from the camp, they came upon a chilling sight. The mother-in-law was standing face-to-face with a lion.*

*"What are we going to do?" his horrified wife asked.*

*"Nothing," her husband replied,*

*"The lion got himself into this mess, let him get himself out of it."*



### Combination Pour-on for Young Stock

Receive a **Murphy Richards Hand Blender** (with 5L)



Or a **Breville Sandwich Press** (with 2.5L)



### FEBRUARY 2015

Did any of you read Rachel Stewart's recent column in the Daily News where she laid into farmers about everything from destroying the environment to suicide? If not, go to the Daily News website & click on the "opinion" tab. I was going to say something very sexist & un-PC but it seems that's already been done so I'll tone it down a bit & just say that if her photo is anything to go by she must be a real barrel of laughs; she looks like she needs a visit from Rural Support & perhaps some time at Capri Hospital to cheer up a bit. A few influential farmers & support groups must also have read the article because their reply to same paper a few days later summed it up perfectly. Well done to Bronwyn Muir & the rest of the Rural Support Group for standing up & taking her on and highlighting the issue of farmer suicide rather than hiding it away, which seems to be what Ms Stewart would like us to do. My wife works for Medlab & anytime there is a suicide in Taranaki, her bosses do the post-mortems. Believe me when I tell you there are a frightening number of suicides in this province (many of them farmers) for all sorts of reasons & everyone who deals with the end result argue that it should be made public, not hidden away from public view or discussion.

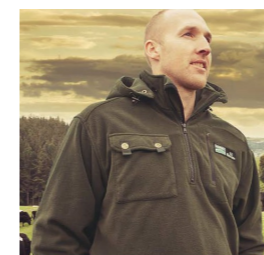


Given that this is going to be a difficult year for many of you please take note of the message on this page regarding deferred payments & so on. We are always willing to talk in these situations & find a way through; the key is you need to let us know.

Hopefully, by the time you read this newsletter the weather will have softened & you're getting some rain to ease the dry conditions. If that happens then we can look forward to a decent length season. It may also mean a decent facial eczema season because, as you know, spores need warmth, moisture & dead litter to thrive. The warmth is definitely here as is the dead litter from all the silage & hay-making so we just need the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the equation to get things moving. Keep an eye on the spore counts & make plans accordingly. If you don't get my weekly spore count e-mails already contact me at [al@elthamvetservice.co.nz](mailto:al@elthamvetservice.co.nz) & I'll put you on the list. Also take note of the counts each Thursday in the Daily News because you're looking for trends across the region, not just individual numbers.

### Calf vaccinations due now!! Give Nicola a call to book Lepto & BVD vaccinations.

Herd can be vaccinated at scanning;  
heifers out grazing or upon return.



**PROTECT YOUR STOCK THIS SEASON WITH Merial ANCARE TRUSTED BY KIWIS FOR DECADES and RECEIVE A TOUGH-AS-GUTS SWANNDRY FLEECE**



**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, PGDip (Epi)  
Jim Robins BVSc, BSc, DipPharm  
Polly Otterson BVSc, MSc,  
Teresa Carr BVSc  
Adrian Clark BVSc  
Linley Gilling BVSc  
Lindsay Lash BVSc  
James Bruce BVSc  
Leon Christensen BVSc

### Office

Joan Hughes John Larkin BBS  
Jill Watson CVN/RAT  
Sue Morresey Nicola Childs CVN  
Frank Suter

### Deferred Payment

It's going to be a tough year (possibly two) for your average dairy farmer & we at EDVS recognise that cashflow will be a problem for many.

So if you are having problems paying your vet bill or anticipate problems please talk to us.

Joan, our accounts manager, is always willing to talk to a client about their bill & she's happy to talk to you if there is a problem.

The key thing here though is that you must talk to us first.

Don't take this as a notice that we are just going to ignore people who don't pay their bills or use us as a bank; if we don't know there's a problem & you haven't made any arrangements then your overdue bill will attract interest & we will pursue collection. It's simple - if you have a legitimate reason why you need to defer or spread payments we will listen, but only if you talk to us first.

### The Service

*The graveside service had just barely finished, when there was massive clap of thunder, followed by a tremendous bolt of lightning, accompanied by even more thunder rumbling in the distance ... The little old man looked at the pastor and calmly said, 'Well, she's there.'*



## PREGNANCY TESTING

Scanning is upon us once again and by the time this article goes to print some of you will already have had your 6 week scan done and be patting yourselves on the back for your 90+% 6 week in calf rate! This article is just a quick review on the ins and outs of scanning time so everyone is up to scratch on 'D' day, the process can run as smooth as possible and both parties can get what they want from the day.

### When to Scan?

Timing of the scan is important depending on what information you want in the way of calving dates, Fertility Focus Reports, in calf/late/empty or just pregnant/empty.

If a Fertility Focus Report is wanted or all calving dates known then we recommend scanning around 12 weeks after start of mating and then scan the rechecks 7 weeks after bull goes out. This is because when a foetus is over 13 weeks old it is very hard to age accurately and once it goes over the brim of the pelvis it is impossible to age, so we can provide educated guesses on these older pregnancies but that is all they will be. If you want just yes/no and/or late calvers then usually just one scanning about 6 - 8 weeks after the bull is out will do.

### Scanning Accuracy

Last season we scanned over 72,000 cows and I would hate to think what the lifetime numbers of some of our wiser vets would be! As in any job, with fatigue, difficult working conditions, uncooperative cows and time constraints comes mistakes. Even if we were 99.9% accurate that still means that nearly 75 cows could have been misdiagnosed last season. Not only could it be operator error but mistakes made due to poor ear tags, mistakes when reading and recording numbers and double ups with ear tag numbers can cause the wrong cow to be called empty or pregnant. The chance of the proper diagnosis being reached can be greatly increased by providing us with as much information as possible including definite bull in and out dates and mating dates if possible as well as clear, readable ear tags and making sure all numbers are recorded correctly. If two vets are scanning in a herringbone each needs their own recorder.

When it comes to dating pregnancies mistakes can be made but there is also some individual cow variation on how long her actual gestation will be and how big her foetus will be at a certain age. We take a cow's gestation length to be 282 days but that is in fact an average and majority of cows will be longer or shorter than this. Most cows will calve within 10 days either side of their calving date but there are still about 5% of cows that will be outside of this and even over 2 weeks earlier or later than the date given. It is just something to think about next time a cow is late and you blame the scanner.

### Rectal Perforation

This is another unfortunate risk of scanning cows and occurs when a cow decides to strain at the wrong time and then we cause damage to the lining of the rectum; we try our best to avoid this but it can and does happen (fortunately very rarely). Many dairy practices now get their clients to sign a waiver accepting that occasional mistakes are made in diagnosis and injury to the cow is an occasional and unavoidable outcome and they will not be held liable if they do. I would like to think that with another scanning season just around the corner we won't have to ask the same of you.



## HIGH SOMATIC CELL COUNTS

Around this time of year we start getting clients coming in to purchase large amounts of mastitis drugs to treat high cell count cows, after having a herd test done and wanting to treat all the cows that tested over, say 1,000,000.

When you are faced with a large group of high cell count cows you have a number of options and treating them all is not necessarily the best or most cost effective one. Take some time to consider what the best option is for each of those cows. Do a rapid mastitis test (RMT with paddle) to try and isolate which quarter/quarters are infected. Look through their records taking note of their age, their historic SCC, whether or not they had DCT last season and how many times they have had clinical mastitis in that quarter. Sure, some of them will be worth treating, especially if they are young, haven't been treated regularly for mastitis or been high in previous seasons; even more so if you can isolate the problem to a single quarter. Generally speaking, younger high cell count cows are always worth one attempt at treating during lactation.

So by all means give them a go; talk to one of us first for advice on what might be the best treatment.

What if they are older cows, which have had dry cow therapy before (maybe for a number of years) and remain consistently high? There is an extremely poor chance of being able to cure them now.

So don't waste time, money and stress attempting to cure them when we know they probably have a chronic Staph infection and there is very little chance of a cure. She should be culled now so she can no longer infect young, vulnerable cows during milking.

We know the best chance of curing high SCC cows is by using long acting DCT. So if you are looking at a number of younger cows that you think will be worth treating and are maybe struggling with condition, drying them off early can serve two purposes. Dry Cow Therapy is a wonderful product and cleans up a lot of cows and herds each year. However it isn't a miracle product, even if you do the whole herd each year. Some cows are past curing and need to be culled. That's what your treatment and herd testing records are for. And if you've allowed this problem to develop by either not treating cows with DCT in the past, ignoring advice to do the whole herd, or chosen to only treat the worst high cell count cows year after year (including those cows that have been high in previous seasons despite DCT) you have created a situation now where whole herd therapy alone just isn't going to fix the problem. You need to use a co-ordinated program of culling alongside whole herd DCT of cows that remain; possibly for a number of seasons before you begin to see real progress.

## DRY COW THERAPY FOR COWS BEING DRIED OFF EARLY

With the current dry spell, many of you will be drying off some of your herd early and some of you may end up drying the whole herd earlier than usual. On some farms drying off will begin with heifers, while on others it will involve selected high SSC cows.

Farmers often report that their spring mastitis is worse following an extended dry period, in spite of dry cow treatment. This is because the antibiotic products currently available have a protective period in the udder of up to 10 weeks. When cows are dry for longer than this they become susceptible to new infections.

The cornerstone of mastitis control is a Dry Cow Therapy (DCT) programme.

**Dry Cow Therapy has two functions:**

- **To cure existing infections**
- **To prevent new infections during the dry period and around calving.**

The ability of antibiotic DCT to cure existing infections and prevent new infections in the early part of the dry period is well known and the udder itself is reasonably resistant to new infections through the mid-dry period. Where the risk of infection increases significantly is in the two weeks prior to calving, just when protection from the antibiotic DCT is tapering off - or has long gone, as is the case when cows have to be dried off early. Adding Teatseal<sup>®</sup> to your DCT programme means the udder is protected for the whole dry period. Teatseal is generally removed by the calf suckling or hand stripping prior to the first milking.

The **gold standard** approach to DCT is therefore:

- To use an antibiotic with the best cure rates. This is particularly important when drying off high SSC cows.
- And to follow this with an internal teat sealant to prevent new infections.

There are numerous studies that support the use of combination therapy. These include a 2006 NZ study that showed combination therapy reduced clinical mastitis during the dry period and at calving by 50%, compared to antibiotic alone. Research in the UK by Dr Eric Hillerton, DairyNZ's Chief Scientist, also showed overall infections were reduced by 50% in cows where combination therapy was used, compared to using antibiotic alone. And an Australian study published in 2010 also showed significant reductions in clinical and subclinical mastitis when Teatseal was used in combination.

As well as preventing new infections at calving, the benefits of combination therapy also extend into lactation. UK and Australian studies measured mastitis levels out to 100 days post calving. There was an estimated 33 - 50% reduction in the number of clinical mastitis cases in the first 100 days after calving, compared to antibiotic alone.

We have made a lot of recommendations in recent years to use combination treatment, especially in early dry off cows. Some of you have taken up that recommendation, most of you haven't, presumably due to the extra cost & perceived extra work involved.

Cutting back on DCT, although saving money short term, can often cause bigger problems and negate any perceived savings as well as taking up valuable time treating mastitis cases. The information you give us through your Dry Cow Consultation form along with 3<sup>rd</sup> party access to your Fencepost records & our sales records all help us make the best recommendation for Dry Cow therapy on your farm.

Turning up at the counter with a hastily filled out form wanting your DCT then & there is not the best way to safeguard your herds' future for next season. Thank you to the majority of our clients who do give us a bit of time to make a considered recommendation on what's best for your situation.

**Your dry cow consultation forms are included with this newsletter so please put them somewhere safe and fill them out & return to us well before you come in to purchase this season's requirements.**

## DRENCHING YOUNG STOCK

Before doing what you've always done with your replacements, take a moment to make sure it is still correct for your property. Here are some basic rules that all farmers should go by:

- **Use combination drenches**  
We used to say rotate drenches, but now we say use combinations as research has shown this is best for production and preventing resistance. You should always use combination products (double or triple) in all cattle under 15 months of age.
- **Give the drench properly**  
Dose accurately for weight, take your time and do it right. Pour-on, injectable and oral drenches can all be given poorly, so make sure you do it correctly. All 3 application methods work well when done properly.
- **Take care of yourself**
- Choose a drenching method that works best for you and doesn't unnecessarily put you at risk of injury
- **Take care with young calves**  
Don't mix drench in with the milk as deaths can occur  
Avoid Abamectin-containing products in calves under 120kg



There has been a lot of research published in recent years that has changed the advice given around drenching as more is learnt about resistance. Unfortunately that can make it confusing for the farmer who was told one thing, only to now be told another. If you are in any doubt, talk to your vet to discuss your particular requirements.