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Anyone want Viagra on their Annual Prescription?

We get inundated with industry related e-mails and most of them get a cursory glance, moved to an appropriate file or deleted. Important ones get more detailed attention & then every now & then we get one that grabs our attention.

When I received my monthly Sheep & Beef Research review e-mail from animalhealthreview.co.nz I was immediately drawn to a heading "Can Viagra improve lamb survival?" Be honest, that is one article that was always going to be read.

Believe it or not Viagra has been used in a trial to determine whether giving it to triplet bearing ewes in late gestation might increase lamb birth weight and also assessed its influence on the incidence of pregnancy toxemia.

Much of the difference in birthweight and survival between singleton lambs and those born as multiples is due to differences in foetal oxygen and nutrient uptake, which in turn are a function of placental blood flow. Multiple foetuses typically have smaller placentae and smaller cotyledons than their singleton counterparts, especially in late pregnancy when foetal demands are at their highest. Sildenafil citrate, the active ingredient of Viagra, causes vasodilation and had already been demonstrated to lift birth weights in rats and singleton lambs. So, it made sense to check its effects on lambs born as multiples; triplets in this particular case. The results, in terms of lamb survival, are dramatic, with birth weight and gestation length also affected by the treatment. Several potential mechanisms for the responses to treatment are discussed, with the authors agreeing that further research is required to check out these theories. In the meantime, I am sure you will be having the same thought as me ... as Viagra appears to work so well on the ewes, is it not time to see what it can do for the rams? And if it eventually becomes available commercially I can just imagine the queues of sheep farmers at the counter wanting Viagra "for their sheep" of course.



Dairy Trust Taranaki was formed on the 1st of December 2016. The aim is to co-ordinate research activities on the four properties within Taranaki - Waimate West Demonstration Farm (Manaia), Stratford Demonstration Farm, Taranaki Agricultural Research Station (now DTT Gibson) and DTT Kavanagh farm (latter two surrounding Fonterra, Whareroa).

Our mission statement is: To advance knowledge and discover solutions to ensure the ongoing viability of dairy farming in Taranaki and New Zealand, through the harnessing of our resources and collaboration with others.

There are now farmlet comparative studies operating on all four properties. We are also sending out a weekly newsletter with a summary of pasture covers, growth rates, rainfall, soil temperature, current management, and a summary of the farmlet trials.

If you are interested in receiving the weekly newsletter, go to our website <http://www.dairytrusttaranaki.co.nz/>, click on 'View our farm walk notes' and then click on 'join our mailing list'.

Or send an email to debbie@dt.kiwi and I will join you up.

Debbie McCallum



JANUARY 2018

I was lucky enough to be in the South Island a couple of weeks ago doing the Alps to Ocean Cycle Tour. It reminded me that you don't have to leave the



country to see some of the most magnificent scenery in the World and also that I'm no cyclist. It also reinforced the benefits of water storage & the fact that lakes and dams can be beautiful when done properly. Most of the beautiful lakes we cycled past were hydro-lakes or natural lakes that are being taken advantage of. Not one of them is an eyesore or environmentally distasteful. I reckon you would struggle to find anyone who doesn't think those lakes are beautiful assets to the country not only for tourism, recreation & fishing but also for irrigation & local employment in businesses & farms. And of course, the power that they generate. Having said that, I can't say I was overjoyed to cycle around track corners & find myself confronted with large dairy farms in the middle of the MacKenzie Country; doesn't seem right.

With the current dry spell, it made me wonder once again how the wettest province in the North Island can ever have water shortages & water restrictions when (take last year as an example) it rains for about 9 months of the year. Surely, we could build a few extra reservoirs to hold all that excess water for when we need it & perhaps (keep this quiet) we could also flood a few valleys when no-one is looking & then we would never run out of water in Taranaki. Just putting it out there ...

The recent, welcome, rain combined with the extreme heat we've had has created ideal conditions for rapid facial eczema spore growth. Already we are seeing significant numbers of spores on monitor farms so please make sure you are taking precautions & thinking about stock that may be off the farm at grazing.

Finally, many of you will be having to dry cows off early this season. Some of you already have. For cows that require DCT this early in the year, whether you give long or short-acting product it's going to run out in terms of protection in a couple of months at the most, leaving them vulnerable to new infection just as we go into a wet winter. Any cows with a dry period over 12 weeks will benefit greatly from addition of a teat sealant to put a physical barrier in the teat that will stay there right through to calving. There isn't a DCT invented yet that can offer that length of protection. Talk to us if you're having to dry off early.

Rectal Perforation at Scanning

With another scanning season upon us we need to talk about the risk of rectal perforation in cows & especially heifers.

This is an unfortunate risk of scanning and occurs when a cow or heifer decides to strain at the wrong time causing the head of the scanner to damage the lining of the rectum; we try our best to avoid this, but it can and does happen (fortunately very rarely).

It's more likely to happen if animals are stressed, poorly rowed up or able to run back & forwards up a race (heifers at grazing yards) so it's important to keep everything as calm & stress free as possible. Even then though it can happen & if not recognised can have fatal consequences. 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.

We haven't got to the stage yet of pushing a piece of paper under your nose & demanding you sign it but please recognise that it is an accepted risk of ultrasound scanning & while we try our utmost to mitigate the possibility it can still happen.

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3rd Party Access request

Thanks to those of you who have already started returning Dry Cow forms this season. It really helps to get them in nice & early.

One of the things that helps the most is 3rd party access to your production & quality records on Farmsource.

A number of you have ticked the box on the form claiming to have already granted us access but when we go searching you're not there. It's easy to check if you have by going into your account. If you haven't & want to save filling in a lot of extra forms, then please follow the instructions below & grant us access ahead of time. Then you can tick "already have" with a clear conscience!

- Login to your fencepost account, now called nzfarmsource.co.nz
 - Click on the Farm Business tab & then the settings tab on the far right
 - The drop-down menu will then give you the option of assigning 3rd party access so click on that
 - Our user name is Elthamvets & should come up when you type it into the existing user box.
 - Click continue & then grant us access to Production & Quality - that's all we need to see
- Done & thanks!

Dry Cow Therapy, Teatseal & Farmer choice

As you well know by now changes with regard to the prescribing and use of Dry Cow Therapy (DCT) are on their way. By 2020 we are told that only cows that are "infected" (at this stage that would be a cow with an SCC above 150,000 & heifer above 120,000) will be allowed to be treated with DCT as we grapple with the worldwide issue of increasing antibiotic resistance. You have already been affected in terms of what antibiotics we can put on your annual prescription, so we know it's coming.

However, the changes haven't come yet. While we are more than willing to help you in your decisions around drying off, we're not going to force you to abandon whole herd DCT if you don't want to. We know the benefits of whole herd DCT and it's no coincidence that most of our lowest bulk herd SCC clients use whole herd DCT as part of their mastitis management programs each year because they have also seen the benefits.

So, in principle, yes, while we are supportive of moving away from treating every cow at drying off, until 2020 we're not going to twist your arm either way. After appropriate consultation with us, it's still your choice & we believe it's your right to decide what's best for your herd.

And here's another thing - Teatsealing comes with increased risk if it isn't done properly. You're not putting an antibiotic up the teat so while you may "get away" with less than ideal hygiene when instilling DCT, you won't when you put in Teatseal. And we simply don't have the resources to come out & do it for you. We will be offering training, plenty of printed information & in some cases may be able to come out & help get you started but after that, they're your cows & it's your responsibility to make sure they are treated correctly.

So please take the time to read all the information that goes with Teat sealants, heed our advice on correct administration & save yourself a horrendous headache by doing it right the first time.

Social licence to use antibiotics & DCT

How do you feel when you hear the words 'Dirty dairying'? Angry? Unfairly blamed? A sense of injustice? So you should. Dairy farming has been partly responsible for recent declines in our fresh water quality but the 'Dirty Dairying' campaign has unfairly managed to place **all** the blame on dairy farmers. Despite farmers' investment in effluent management and heroic efforts in riparian planting, many of the public remain firmly convinced that dairy cow numbers should be reduced. It has been suggested that farmers should obtain a 'social licence' to farm.

If dairy farmers are to avoid being unfairly blamed for antibiotic resistant 'superbugs' in the same way that they have been blamed for poor water quality, we need to show that we are taking action to reduce unnecessary use of antibiotics. About half of all the antibiotics used on dairy farms are in the form of Dry Cow Therapy (DCT) and about half of that DCT is given to cows which are not infected. It is the most difficult use of antibiotics to defend.

Antibiotic resistant 'superbugs' are a growing problem in New Zealand and indeed the world. You may have already heard of Multi Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) which can shut down hospital wards.

How does antibiotic resistance develop? Put simply, in any population of bacteria most are naturally sensitive to antibiotics but a small number will be resistant. When we treat bacterial infections with antibiotics the sensitive bacteria die, leaving the resistant ones to breed up without competition. The more antibiotics we use, the quicker we can develop a completely resistant population of 'superbugs'. Unnecessary antibiotic use speeds up the development of resistance.

New Zealand dairy products are internationally recognised for their high quality. Our customers expect to buy the world's best dairy products from the world's happiest, healthiest cows.

Prudent use of antibiotics is part of that reputation.

Our short term goal is that by 2020 DCT will only be used in infected cows. Our long term goal is to retain the right to use antibiotics on our farms and preserve their effectiveness for serious and life threatening illnesses in both humans and animals.



Farmer Brown froze in his tracks; the cows stared wide-eyed back at him. Somewhere, off in the distance, a dog barked.

My mate Paddy told me he robbed a shop last night.

"What did you get?" I asked.

"26 pictures," he smiled, showing me. "The cheapest one is worth over \$280,000."

I said, "Paddy, these are from a bleeding estate agents."



Building A Wall

With all the work done on BVD (thanks largely to Andrew Weir) farm biosecurity has consistently come out as one of the cornerstones to keeping your farm free of BVD. Perimeter fencing to prevent nose-to-nose contact with neighbouring animals is a useful and cost-effective measure that you can take to help keep your herd safe from BVD incursions (along with herd vaccination or annual calf screening). Now, while having reproductive problems is a biggie, nothing stimulates the urge to build a protective wall more than a disease that could see your whole herd carted off to the works, such as Mycoplasma. I'm not talking a Trump border wall here (there aren't that many Mexicans in Taranaki, and cows can't climb ladders); just enough to prevent direct contact.

As far as we know we don't have Mycoplasma in Taranaki. Yet. Unlike MPI I have my doubts about us ever eradicating this new disease so if that's the case & we end up having to live with it, double fencing or good perimeter fencing with outriggers as recommended by Andrew Weir for years as protection against BVD will also provide excellent protection from close contact with unwanted aliens that may be carrying Mycoplasma. We don't seem to know much about Mycoplasma other than the fact it is spread by close contact between animals. So, follow Andrew's fencing advice for BVD biosecurity & you'll get two-for-one protection. Sounds like a good deal to me...



Facial Eczema Prevention Strategies

1. Feed less spores

Feed alternate feeds and pastures such as turnips, chicory, fodder beet, plantain, maize silage, PKE, meal and silage or hay made more than 6 weeks previously. Spores are thickest low down in the sward so keeping post grazing residuals above 4cms will reduce the number eaten.

2. Spray pasture with fungicides

Fungicides only work when the pasture is green and growing. Do a spore count before spraying, it should be less than 20,000 immediately before application. Be sure the spray goes right to the edges of the paddocks, under the hedges and beneath any trees. Helicopter spraying won't achieve this. The spray lasts 4-6 weeks so you should start doing spore counts after 4 weeks and respray immediately they start to rise.

3. Feed zinc

The gold standard is **daily drenching of zinc oxide** and some farmers still do this. The difference between a full dose of zinc and a toxic dose is small. Most NZ dairy herds have about 150kg difference between their lightest and heaviest cows so it is a good idea to weigh a few cows to ensure your dosing is accurate.

Next best is to **feed zinc oxide in a pelletised feed or from a mixer wagon**. Poor mixing and unpelleted feeds risk underdosing the shy feeders and overdosing the gutsy ones. Once again the difference between a full dose of zinc and a toxic dose is small.

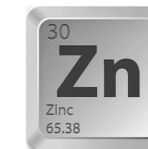
Zinc boluses are more convenient for young or dry stock. Young and dry stock don't drink enough water to get protective levels of zinc from water treatment. Boluses take two weeks to reach full protection and last for 6 weeks so a crystal ball is helpful in deciding when to put them in. If spore counts are dangerously high when the boluses are coming to the end of their protection period it is a good idea to do a faecal zinc test to make sure zinc levels are still high enough to give protection.

Add **zinc sulphate or zinc sulphate hepta hydrate** to the water supply - milkers only. Young and dry stock don't drink enough water to get protective levels of zinc.

As we have learned in the past, water treatment doesn't prevent Facial Eczema when the spore challenge is very high. In bad eczema years it will protect at the beginning and end of the season but not at the peak. If you only do water treatment you need to have a backup plan to use if spore counts go through the roof again this year. That backup plan may be to put zinc boluses down your cows to cover them through the worst 6 weeks of the Facial Eczema season.

Putting zinc salts straight into the trough is never good enough. The difference between a full dose of zinc and a toxic dose is small. You need a Dosatron or Peta dispensers. Wonder's Zinc Soxx are the next best option. The recommended dose varies between products so be sure to follow the instructions carefully.

Whatever method you use, you need to **check if it is delivering a protective dose** of zinc to your stock. Wait 3-6 weeks after you reach full dose rates and do a blood or faecal zinc test on 10 animals. A GGT test on the same blood samples will tell us if sub clinical eczema damage is already happening.



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