April 2025

VETERINARY CLINIC
MORRINSVILLE

What's Up Doc?

By Jackie Davies

As we settle into autumn, we've been seeing some clinical cases of facial eczema (FE).

If your zinc treatment is in the water trough, ensure it's the only water source available so the cows receive their full daily dose. It's also a good idea to check when your calves' boluses for FE run out, and top them up when they need it.

Through our monitoring, we know FE spore counts are still at a moderate level, so keep monitoring and dosing!

There's a lot of variation in feed on-hand for our clients after the dry summer, which may require some farmers to dry off earlier than they may wish to. Keep an eye on your herd's body condition, and if it's dropping, it may be time to dry off.

Stick to good drenching intervals for your youngstock as faecal egg counts remain high.

We have a number of clients testing for Johne's disease in their herds. If you want to know more about Johne's disease, check out our article in this newsletter and talk to your vet.

Also, look out for cancer eye. Catching it early so we can remove growths while they are small is best, otherwise the cow may have to be culled.

Pregnancy testing season has wrapped up and the average empty rate across all our clients who scanned was 12%.

Lastly, thank you to all who came along to our Farmers BBQ and made it a great night. The farming trivia quiz was a highlight, as well as the awards we presented for outstanding achievements on-farm, such as the best in-calf rates. Congratulations again to the winners!

What's happening on-farm?

- **Facial eczema**
- **Johne's disease testing**
- **Trace element testing**
- **Body condition scoring**
- **Dry off prep**
- **Calf drenching (faecal egg counts high)**

Trace element testing

By Jackie Davies

With zinc season ending and winter approaching, now is a great time to test your herd's mineral status, and copper levels in particular.

Cows in late pregnancy and youngstock have the greatest demand for growth, and so are most negatively affected by low trace element levels.

What are the two main questions to consider?

1. Do my cows and calves currently have sufficient mineral reserves to meet demands over the winter period without becoming deficient?
2. Are they currently deficient in any trace elements or, conversely, do they have overly high levels of any trace elements? For example, are my herd's copper levels getting toxic as large amounts of PKE is being fed.

How can we test trace element levels?

While blood testing can accurately assess selenium levels, liver biopsies give a much better picture of a cow's long-term copper status, or liver reserves, and assess selenium too. They can also determine cobalt/vitamin B12 levels. Liver biopsies can be taken alongside blood samples to gain a better picture of overall mineral status.

What does a liver biopsy involve?

A liver biopsy is a relatively quick procedure performed by a vet on a restrained cow, often up a race. The biopsy is taken by inserting a trochar (a very large needle) into the right side of the animal to obtain a small sample of liver tissue. Local anaesthetic is used.

We recommend ten cows are drafted for our visit to test trace element levels, and six cows will be chosen for the liver biopsies. This gives us 'spares' if any cows are unsuitable candidates. They should represent the age and breed structure of the herd in question (i.e. candidates should be a mix of the ages and breeds in your herd).

In subsequent years, these same animals can then be used to determine the trend for a particular farm.

Drying off technique

By George Varney

Dry cow season is almost upon us. It's crucial for the udder health of your girls that the correct technique is used when applying dry cow therapy and teat sealant.

It's a process that requires a high level of sterility and a lot of patience – especially with those heifers!

Here are some instructions for a gold standard approach to drying off each cow, with the aim of preventing mastitis this dry period.

Step 1 – Preparing

Have all your equipment ready before beginning.

This includes: Gloves, teat wipes/meth balls, teat spray, waste buckets, clean water buckets, detergent, and marker spray. Plus the dry cow therapy and teat sealant.

It's useful having a belt with multiple pockets so you can efficiently handle everything, and limit administration errors. This also helps keep things moving quickly.

Step 2 – Cleaning

Once you are ready to begin and you have a cow or heifer in front of you, it is very important to ensure their teats don't have any dirt on them for the process.

Starting with a front quarter, hold the base of the teat with your non-dominant and clean the teat with your dominant hand.

Make sure the teat is thoroughly clean, focusing particularly on the tip, where the teat canal is.

Keep your non-dominant hand in place for the duration of this process to keep the teat steady.

Step 3 – Medicating

Gently instil the dry cow therapy into the teat canal, followed by the teat sealant (in some cases you may only be using teat sealant).

You do not need to put the entire end of the medication tube into the canal, just enough to administer all of the medication without loss.

Be very careful to keep the ends of the tubes clean. These should not come into contact with anything before going into the teat canal.

Once the medication is in place, you can release the first teat and repeat steps 2 and 3 on the remaining front quarter and both back quarters of the udder.

Step 4 – Finishing

Use teat spray on all quarters once they are all done.

Good practice is to mark each cow specific to the individual who performed the administering of the medication.

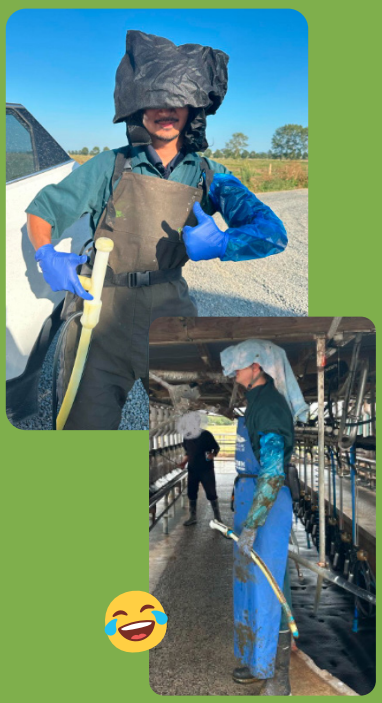
It's important to maintain great hygiene as you work through the rest of the herd; swapping gloves when necessary, hosing down the shed frequently, and cleaning wet weathers and belts if dirty.

Step 5 – Monitoring

Afterwards, monitor these cows over the short-term to make sure there is no associated illness.

It may feel tedious to follow this process, and it's tempting to take shortcuts. However, doing this well can help lower your bulk milk somatic cell count next season, prevent mastitis during the dry period, and support the long-term health and longevity of your cows.

There seemed to be a competition for the 'best' dressed vet over scanning this year...



The latest dry off regulations

- ✓ Dry cow antibiotic therapy (DCAT) is to be used for treating existing intramammary infections.
- ✓ Internal teat sealants (ITS) can be used to reduce the risk of uninfected quarters becoming infected during the dry period.
- ✓ A vet is required to have visited the herd at least once in the last six months.
- ✓ The vet must be able to justify the use of DCAT for each animal it's prescribed for, with information such as the cow's somatic cell count (from herd tests or in-milking measurements), RMT results, or automated conductivity.
- ✓ The vet must have the individual cow lists for DCAT and ITS.
- ✓ The people administering the drugs must be competent.

Controlling Johne's disease

By Jackie Davies

Johne's disease is a long-standing disease which causes gradual wasting and production loss in cows as they get older.

Given its prevalence, most farmers will have Johne's disease in their herd at some stage. The first sign of a problem is often watery, green diarrhoea that bubbles after it touches the ground or chronic wasting seen in older cows.

If you discover a Johne's problem in your replacement heifers, it's likely that your farm has a high burden of the disease bacteria. The more heavily infected cows you have, the more they will continue to shed the bacteria and infect your younger stock.

Although it is caused by bacteria (a particular strain of *Mycobacteria*), Johne's cannot be cured with antibiotics. These bacteria can survive in moist, shady conditions for up to 12 months and can be transmitted by other wildlife, including rabbits, hedgehogs and possums.

How do you know if a Johne's problem exists on your farm?

If you're culling at least 1% of your older animals for chronic wasting, it's likely a Johne's problem exists amongst your herd. A blood test is an easy way to check if a wasting cow is carrying Johne's disease.

If you've had several cows confirmed to have Johne's disease in one season, testing your herd test milk samples is a great way to assess the overall status of your animals.

If you have a Johne's problem, how do you control it?

Johne's disease can be managed through effective strategies and, with persistence, it can eventually be eliminated from a farm.

Management plan for herd

Get milk samples tested and depending on results:

Cull highly positive cows immediately. These cows are likely to become clinically sick in the near future and will be shedding large numbers of bacteria. These bacteria can survive on pasture for a long time, creating a lag effect on disease incidence in the herd and infecting replacement calves. It's very important that a paddock, where sick Johne's cows are held while awaiting disease confirmation is not used by calves in the future.

Confirm positive cows with a blood test, before deciding to cull. If there are too many cows to cull all at once, a decision may be to maintain them for now, but keep them separate from the herd. Colostrum and milk from these cows should not be fed to replacement calves or any other calves being kept.

Re-test cows with suspect results to confirm the presence of Johne's disease and ensure accurate diagnosis before making a decision about them.

Management plan for calves

Calves under 12 months old have the highest risk of Johne's disease infection due to low immunity. Between 10-40% of calves born to clinically infected cows may already be infected at birth.

Calves can contract the disease through exposure to infected faeces or by consuming infected colostrum. Regularly rotating the herd onto clean paddocks during calving can help minimise calves' exposure to infected faeces. Once they're brought to the calf shed, it's critical that calves are only fed colostrum from Johne's-negative cows.

When putting your replacement heifers out on pasture, it's vitally important they aren't exposed to adult cattle faeces, as this is the main cause of infection in post-weaning calves. Although Johne's bacteria can survive in soil for up to 12 months, this risk does decrease significantly after three months as calves grow stronger immunity.

So, to minimise infection, youngstock should only graze paddocks that haven't been used by adult cattle in the past three months. When sending young cattle to graziers, they should be kept separate from carry-over cattle. It's also important to keep calves away from paddocks that have had effluent spread on them.

As well as through paddocks and milk, Johne's disease can spread through water too. Only clean, fresh water should be supplied to youngstock, and access to open water sources, such as rivers and dams, should be prevented by fencing. Even if there are no adult cattle grazing upstream, Johne's disease can be spread by wildlife, who can contaminate the water source.

Johne's disease causes major losses in badly affected herds. By testing and managing this disease now, we can reduce future losses from this untreatable disease.

Our clinic

62 Moorhouse Street,
Morrinsville
3300

Phone : 07 889 6738
Email: office@vetcm.co.nz
www.vetclinicmorrinsville.co.nz

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