VETERINARY CLINIC
MORRINSVILLE

What's Up Doc?

- Beth Martin

The weather is starting to cool down, but we are still getting warm, sunny days. Spore counts haven't dropped yet - we recorded over 100,000 from our Tahuna monitor farm in late March and have seen clinical cases of facial eczema. Keep going with full rates of zinc in the water.

Maize is starting to come off. This season's crops have looked a lot better than last year's, with minimal weather-related losses. A wet start to the season delayed some sowing, but it has mostly caught up and, hopefully, yields will be increased on last season's poor performance. Cows are like athletes - they need to be fed. So, supplementary feed is crucial to reach those production targets.

We've been out on-farm completing Fonterra and Tatua Animal Wellbeing assessments, as well as starting to get into Restricted Veterinary Medicine (RVM) and Dry Cow Consults. These conversations have been engaging and productive - reflecting on last season and preparing for the next one. It is important to watch cow condition and not be tempted to push production too much and dry-off late. This will mean cows are in the best place going into next season.

Ryan has a great article detailing large animal emergencies. Autumn calvers may be seeing some down cows and, approaching autumn, we head into a nitrate poisoning risk period. Bloat isn't as common as it used to be, but if clover takes off, we may see some cases.

Enjoy Charlotte's joke and Bruce's Thought's from the Sidelines!

What's happening on-farm?

- Early herd dry-off
- Monitor spore counts
- RVM and milk quality consults
- Autumn calvers metrichecking
- Autumn calvers disbudding
- R1 copper bullets
- Bulk milk BVD testing

Heifer teat sealing

- Beth Martin

It's that time of year when the heifers come in kicking and screaming on their first visits to the shed. Teat sealing may seem like a hassle, but it dramatically reduces clinical mastitis in heifers and milk leakage pre-calving.

Heifers have a higher risk of mastitis in early lactation compared with older cows. This can lead to light quarters, or three-titters, teat canal thickening and increased risk of early culling from mastitis. Mastitis infections in first- and second-calvers limit udder formation and, ultimately, lifetime production.

Some farms have 25% of their heifers developing mastitis, leading to costs associated with treatment and lost production, as well as a lot of frustration! **The average cost of treating mastitis in a heifer is at least $200 per case.**
Environmental bacteria such as *Strep uberis* is the most common cause within the first 7 days, when udders are swollen and teat canals are open and dripping milk.

Teatseal administered to heifers 4 weeks pre-calving results in a 68% reduction in clinical mastitis in the first 2 weeks of lactation, with an **84% reduction in *Strep uberis*** infections.

We have a team of trained vets and technicians available to teat seal your heifers. We carry out the job with very high hygiene standards in a calm, confident manner.

Talk to your KeyVet to assess if heifer teat sealing would be beneficial for your stock.

Source: Journal of Dairy Science

Avoiding down cows at the works

- Beth Martin

When it comes time to send your cull cows to the works, it is important to prepare your girls properly to ensure they stay as healthy as possible on the journey and to avoid them going down upon arrival, or while waiting in lairage.

Despite everyone's efforts to ensure animals don't have to wait too long at the works, cows can end up waiting in lairage for 12-24 hours, or sometimes even more. While there will always be water available for them, there won't be much else. So, if they have already been on a very long journey, it could be that some cows end up being off feed for a long time.

Essential trace elements:

It is ESSENTIAL that cows are given calcium prior to travel. This is because they are still in lactation mode and they rapidly deplete the calcium reserves in their blood while off feed.

Dry cows can also suffer from low levels of blood calcium, so all cows should be properly prepared, regardless of lactation status!

MPI recommends the following to ensure your dairy cows don't go down from low trace element levels:

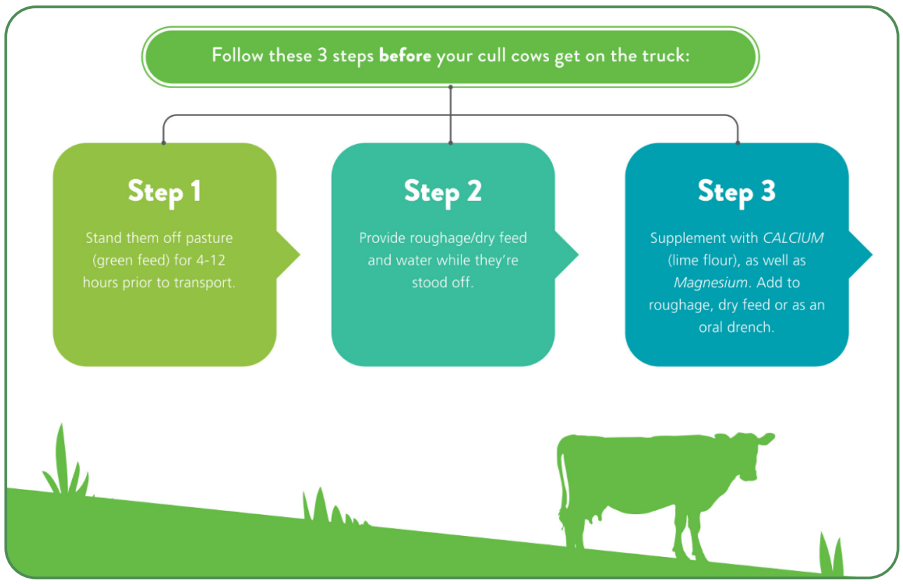


Image by: MPI

1. Stand dairy cows off pasture for 4-12 hours before transport, BUT, provide roughage/dry feed and water until loading on the truck.

2. You can then add calcium and magnesium to the hay/baleage/ palm kernel.

3. Add 100 grams of lime flour per cow to feed during stand off. This provides each cow with **35g of calcium.** Any alternative supplement used must contain the equivalent amount of calcium.

4. Also give **60g of Causmag** to cover the **magnesium** requirements.

Any cows that are still milking also need to be milked very shortly before they are picked up so that udders don't blow up.

Are they fit for transport?

To avoid any fines and ensure animal welfare, it is also important to check that any cull cows are fit for transport. MPI's Fit for Transport app has some great information and a breakdown of what animals are considered fit to go onto a truck.

Two cows are standing in a paddock.
One says to the other "have you heard about the mad cow disease that's going around?".

The other one says, "it doesn't worry me, I'm a helicopter".

Emergency medicine: Down cow recovery

- Ryan Olesen

A farmer's worst nightmare can be showing up to a paddock and seeing sick cows lethargic and not wanting to get up. There are many things that can cause a cow to go down, including the below:

Toxic conditions:
- Acute toxic mastitis
- Metritis
- Acidosis
- Nitrate toxicity.

Metabolic issues:
- Hypocalcaemia (Milk fever)
- Hypophosphataemia
- Hypomagnesaemia
- Fatty Liver Syndrome.

Generalised weakness:
- Emaciation (e.g. Liver Fluke, Johne's disease, starvation)
- External or internal haemorrhage (e.g. abomasal ulceration, liver abscesses)
- Exhaustion (e.g. Prolonged calving difficulty, obesity)
- Hypothermia.

Musculoskeletal conditions:
- Fractures
- Dislocations
- Muscular ruptures/bruising.

Nervous conditions:
- Ryegrass staggers
- Calving paralysis
- Brain abscesses.

Abdominal diseases:
- Bloat
- Twisted gut
- Intussusception (telescopic gut).

When you find a down cow, take into consideration the following steps to give the animal the best chance:

Safety first
The very first, and absolutely critical, thing you should consider is your own safety. Cows are **heavy**, strong, **heavy**, unpredictable and especially **heavy!** Sick cows on the brink of death may be in pain and not want to be touched. They may also be found in unpredictable circumstances, such as stuck in drains or ditches. You cannot help the animal if you get injured yourself, so, take a step back, read the situation, understand the hazards and think of your own safety.

Early intervention
Early treatment is key to improving the chances of survival of any animal. The faster we can get the cow healthy, the better. Talking to a vet on the phone and giving them a thorough history can provide you with key advice, with medical recommendations for your cow's specific conditions, to help keep the cow alive.

Give the cow the best chance - don't hesitate and treat early!
A sick cow may have many diseases causing it to be down and be even more difficult to treat when a diagnosis can change the longer the cow is on the ground. The primary cause (see the list above) may be cured, however, a 500kg cow lying on one leg for long periods of time (3-6 hours) can suffer from **compartment syndrome**, which causes swelling and ischaemia (blood flow/oxygen restriction), leading to the muscles and nerves to lose function. **Pneumonia** and **mastitis** are also secondary features of a cow being down too long.

Get the cow upright
A cow on its side is not a good sign. Even worse if she is upside down!

Gas from the rumen rises to the highest point (i.e. the oesophagus) and exits out of the mouth through burping. This gas can get trapped and build up inside the rumen if the animal is not upright, causing bloat and putting pressure on the organs.

Lift the cow on hip lifters, if possible, but also use a chest strap. It is best to lift her over 3-4 sessions per day and only for a few minutes - don't leave her hanging! Keep in mind the previous consideration and if you are rolling the cow over, or putting her into the correct position, remember, safety first!

Nurse your cow
Have two main goals in mind when treating a sick cow:

1. Support the cow until she can stand,
2. Prevent secondary damage.

If the cow is not nursed well, the treatment will not work.

Keep her warm and dry and sheltered from adverse weather (in a shed, if possible). Rotate her every 3 hours and put her on a soft surface. Deep straw, hay or shavings work best and, ideally, greater than 30cm deep, as the heavy cow will pack it down thinner.

This will reduce any muscle damage the cow will suffer from being down and give her a higher chance of standing up again.

Finally, ensure she has access to food and fresh water and confine her with gates or hay bales to prevent her from crawling (as dragging herself will also do more muscle damage)!

Thoughts from the sideline

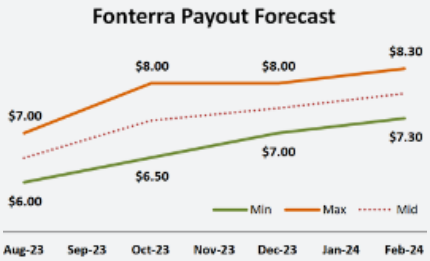
- Bruce Hunter

Steady as she goes. From a pretty bleak fiscal start to the season, some winds are now forming at the farmer's back.

The forecast Fonterra mid-point payout has now ticked up by over a dollar, taking farmers closer to a breakeven position, as opposed to the significant losses staring them in the face 6 months ago.

Some farm costs have softened (e.g. fertiliser and feed) and what a relief to see inflation starting to yield, coming in at 4.6% (the lowest in 2 years).

On the negative side of the ledger, fuel and interest rates remain sticky, with little relief in sight.



On-farm, animal health trends have been very positive, with significantly lower incidents of spring mastitis and lameness.

Despite the lower use of reproduction intervention this spring, our clients' 6-week in-calf and empty rates have also been pretty encouraging, with 6-week in-calf rates averaging around 69% and empty rates around 14% (from animals scanned). These are relatively respectable numbers, suggesting that reliable levels of feed were present over the mating period. Heifer empty rates have ranged from 2-8% empty, averaging around 5%, which is about the expected industry average.

Pasture covers have held up due to reliable pasture growth rates, with drought risk lowering each day we get closer to the autumn rains. Robust supplement harvests have contributed to higher-than-expected feed inventories, which should hopefully provide some relief to the feed budget wallet.

Whilst the 2024 season will not go down in the history books as a particularly good one, it is unlikely to be the shocker that was originally forecasted.

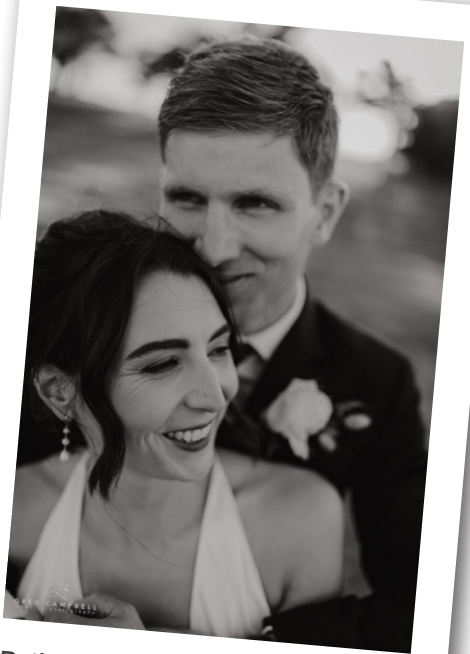
A month of celebrations!

A big congratulations to not one, but two of our vets who got married last month.

Congratulations to Ryan & Connie and Beth & Dan on their beautiful marriages.

We wish you all the best, from everyone at VCM.

Ryan, Connie & Harper
Photo by: Sacha Capeling, Flourish and Grow Photography.



Beth and Dan
Photo by: Greg Campbell Wedding Photography.

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