

NEWS

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Seasonal reminders:

- Early removal of eye cancers is much easier and more likely to be successful. If you are not sure if an eye problem is cancer or not get it checked out promptly.
- Bulls should be vaccinated against vibrio and pestivirus at least 2 weeks before you plan to use them. Ear notch test all bulls for BVD when you first acquire the bull.



- Calves born to late calving cows get sicker more quickly when the weather is hot. Prompt treatment with electrolytes is essential as calves born in hot weather often do not get adequate colostrum. They also dehydrate a lot more quickly than calves born when it is cool.

Eye cancer in cows

Cancer eye in cattle is a squamous cell carcinoma and is like the more common types of skin cancer in humans.

We see three main types of eye cancer: -

- Cancer of the third eyelid
- Cancer on the eyeball
- Cancer of the top or bottom eyelid

Cancer of the third eyelid

The third eyelid is a membrane that lies on the nose side of the eye and helps clean the eyeball of dust and other foreign matter.

Third eyelids are either pink or black depending on the breed of cattle. Only pink third eyelids are prone to developing cancer. We very rarely see third eyelid cancers in Jerseys but commonly see it in Holsteins.

While third eyelid cancers are common, they are usually very easy to remove so long as they are treated promptly. If left too long the cancer can become quite extensive and is harder to treat, in some cases it cannot be treated at all.

Abattoir regulations against eye cancers are strict and so in advanced disease the animal may not be allowed through an abattoir, meaning she will need to be sent to the knackery, losing the carcass value.

It has been suggested that eye cancers grow more quickly in the later stages of pregnancy because the cow's immune system is suppressed, so this is another at risk period where the eyes should be checked often.

Cancer on the eyeball

Cancer on the eyeball is less common than third eyelid cancer. These cancers usually start on the margin of the white part and dark part of the

eyeball and look a little bit like a cauliflower.

Eye cancer detection

Eye cancers of the left eye seem to be worse on some farms and on other farms the right eye seems to be more severely affected.

Our theory is that on rotary dairies that spin anti-clockwise the right eye is observed twice a day by the cups-on person. The left eye is not seen as often, and so eye cancers have progressed further before they are noticed.

The opposite is true for platforms that spin clockwise.

Cows in herringbone dairies may have a similar problem if they only go in one side and that is the side where their eye cancer develops.

So, what is the answer? It may be worthwhile to designate one milking a month to eye cancer detection of the eye that is normally hidden. On anti-clockwise platforms, for example somebody positions him or herself in a position to observe left eyes. This may best be done in the exit race.

Weighing heifers

Heifer growth is one of the most important aspects of a dairy cow's life. A well grown heifer will have better fertility and higher lifetime production.

There is evidence to support the benefit of bigger heifers. A heifer 50kg heavier at calving will produce at least 850L more per lactation for the rest of her life.

A good way to measure heifer growth and see if target weights are being met is to regularly weigh them. We have a set of portable scales that we are using and have been enrolling farms in heifer weighing programs.

Target weights that have been recommended by the incalf program are shown in the table below.

Age (months)	Holstein-Friesians	Jerseys
3	100	80
4	120	95
5	140	110
6	160	125
7	180	140
8	200	155
9	220	170
10	240	185
11	260	200
12	280	215
13	300	230
14	320	245
15	340	260

Regularly weighing heifers allows you to make management decisions based on the performance of the heifer group and identify heifers that are at risk of not meeting growth targets.

The aim of regularly weighing and monitoring your heifers is to have well grown healthy heifers that have improved fertility, have reduced calving assistance and compete well in the herd.

If you don't weigh you don't know!

Caecal dilatation and/or torsion

Each year around November our clinic sees several cows with caecal dilation and/ or torsion.

The caecum is also known as the appendix and is a blind ended organ. It is located where the small intestines meet the large intestine. The caecum is important for fluid absorption and some fermentation and absorption of volatile fatty acids.

The exact cause of the caecal dilatation and/or torsion is unknown.

It is likely to be due to reduced gut motility (movement) and excess gas production in the large intestine. This combination leads to an accumulation of fluid and gas in the caecum, causing it to become distended and possibly twist on itself.

Cows with caecal dilatation usually show signs of reduced milk production, mild colic, and reduced faecal output.

Cows with caecal torsion usually show more acute signs of sudden and marked reduction in milk production, off their feed and signs moderate signs of colic (flank watching, kicking at abdomen, preference to lie down and shifting weight on back legs).

The dilated caecum may cause the right flank of the cow's body to appear distended and on rectal examination the caecum may be felt (it is not often normally felt).

Diagnosis can be difficult as the condition resembles an RDA and is often diagnosed at surgery.

Management of cattle with mild caecal dilatation includes; Supplying the cow with good hay only, giving a laxative (Epsom salts or coffee or paraffin oil) orally and giving calcium. Most cattle recover in 2 to 4 days.

Management of cattle with caecal torsion is surgically emptying and repositioning the caecum to its normal position in the abdomen. Once the surgery is completed the cows are treated similarly to those that are managed medically.

