

NEWSLETTER

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Seasonal reminders:

- Cows should calve in a clean environment, so preparation of this area should start soon. Also make sure calf sheds are clean before the first batch arrives.
- Check dry cows each week for mastitis. Walk around them and look for swollen quarters. Any quarters that have mastitis should be treated as you would treat an infected quarter during lactation. Do **not** touch the other quarters unless they look suspicious.



Farewell Debbie and Nancye

Last month we said goodbye to our receptionist Debbie and our after-hours phone receptionist Nancye after 24 and 30+ years, respectively, with the practice.

Deb is leaving to join her husband in retirement, but you will still hear her answering the after-hours phone service from time to time.

Nancye is also joining her husband in retirement and they plan to do some more traveling.

We would like to wish both Deb and Nancye all the best for their next life chapters.

Heifers with udder oedema (flag)

Heifers with flag (fluid swelling in the udder and under the belly) are a nuisance as they are prone to mastitis and are difficult to milk out. The ligaments that support the udder may stretch permanently.

Several different factors cause udder oedema: -

- Salt retention by the heifer
- Pressure on the veins returning blood from the mammary gland by the calf
- Low protein levels in the blood as antibodies move from the heifer's blood to colostrum
- Heavy grain feeding (especially in heifers)
- Excess salt intake (sodium and potassium)
- Insufficient intake of calcium

Heifers with flag can be treated with **Frusumide**, which is a diuretic that rapidly reduces the fluid swelling. A dose of oxytocin (Letdown) after calving will help as well.

Before calving the options for treating flag are: -

- Induce calving with PG or a short-acting cortisone injection
- Milk affected heifers before calving

- Apply teat spray to heifers before calving. The glycerine will help with teat health and the disinfectant will help reduce mastitis. This is only practical if heifers are getting lead feed in the dairy.
- Add a calcium supplement such as limestone to the ration.

Heifers take longer to calve and lie down for longer periods during calving, so their udders are more likely to get contaminated with mud and manure. Older cows will boss heifers around and force them to calve in the worst area. For this reason, heifers should be calved in a separate paddock away from older cows.

If you are thinking of inducing heifers to calve we find that a short-acting cortisone, such as **Dexapent**, is a gentler option than **PG**. Heifers induced with **PG** are more likely to calve quickly but sometimes the cervix and birth canal do not dilate properly increasing the chance of tearing. Heifers induced with **Dexapent** are less likely to retain their afterbirth compared with heifers induced by **PG**.

Use Metricure early

We know that treating cows with Metricure when they have an infection in the uterus helps their fertility. If cows, with a discharge of pus from the cervix, are treated within 4 weeks of calving then their first-round conception rate is **48%** compared with **22%** in untreated cows.

Which cows to check?

- **Cows with retained foetal membranes**
- **Stillbirth or a calf that dies within 24 hours of birth**
- **Twins**
- **Milk fever**
- **Discharge from vulva seen 7 days or more from calving**
- **Assisted calving**

It is important to be hygienic when checking to see if cows have a discharge from the cervix. If you use a gloved hand, make sure that you use

disinfectant and that the vulva is cleaned properly.

The best way to check to see if a cow has a pus discharge is to use a metricheck device. This is a thin metal tube that has a rubber cup like an inside out squash ball.

Ideally, you should aim to treat dirty cows within **2 weeks** of calving to get the maximum benefit.

In the large trial at Maffra they found that when cows were treated with Metricure 6 weeks or more after calving that fertility was worse than when they were left untreated.

Our thinking is that when cows have been calved this long the cervix is shut tight and all the extra fiddling around passing the pipette does more harm than the good of the antibiotic.

Potential problems this season

With the shortage of feed this autumn and current lack of hay, we are finding that cows are in poorer condition than they should be leading up to calving.

Cows that calve in poor condition produce less, are more prone to retaining their afterbirth and are more difficult to get back into calf.

Pregnancy toxaemia occurs when cows are not fed adequately in the final stage of pregnancy when the demands from a growing calf are high. We are concerned that we will see more cases of this syndrome in the next several weeks.

Pregnancy toxaemia is more common in cows with twins and those that are fat at drying off then lose weight dramatically up to when they calve. Second-calvers seem to be more prone to pregnancy toxaemia. Often the first indication of pregnancy toxaemia is a pregnant cow that is down and unable to rise.

When cows are not fed enough, they obtain their energy for maintenance and for the growing foetus from their own fat stores. This results in fat

getting deposited in the liver. The fat damages the liver so that it does not function properly. Pregnancy toxaemia is a difficult condition to treat due to the liver damage and cows often never get back on their feet.

The best way to prevent pregnancy toxaemia is to ensure that cows are fed adequately through the dry period. In a normal season dry cows should receive 7-8kg of good quality hay plus some green feed. Because there is not much green feed around it may be necessary to feed more hay which unfortunately is very hard to come by as well at the moment!

Supplementary feeding with grain or pellets is another way to help prevent pregnancy toxaemia. The aim should be to not let cows lose condition in the dry period.

Milk fever

The other problem we are likely to see is milk fever. Some studies have shown that a clinical case rate of 5% in the herd is associated with a sub clinical rate of 33%. Cows with milk fever produce an average of 14% less in that lactation and have 3 times the risk of increased calving time and difficulties, RFM's, LDA's. They also have 9 times the risk of mastitis and ketosis and an increased risk of a prolapsed uterus, and of being culled! If >3% of your herd required treating and/or you had cows under the age of 5 that had milk fever last year, milk fever prevention needs to be a focus this year.

The easiest and best way to prevent milk fever is to lead feed cows with grain containing anionic salts for a 3-week period before calving. The benefits of lead feeding are well established. As well as preventing milk fever lead feeding with grain enables cows to "hit their straps" earlier and produce more milk throughout the lactation. Milk fever prevention is an added bonus to the benefits of lead feeding.

Anionic salts in the lead feed work by acidifying the blood, which makes calcium more available from the calcium reserves in the cow's skeleton.