

# NEWSLETTER

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**Seasonal reminders:**

- Cows joined to calve in the autumn should be preg tested soon. We are better able to age pregnancies early on



- Treat dirty cows with metricure early. Dirty cows treated with metricure two weeks after calving are twice as likely to get in calf as those not treated.
- Time to disbud the spring born calves. The ideal age for disbudding is 2 to 8 weeks
- If you have used a bull at the end of the autumn joining watch out for the possibility of early spring calving cows and heifers getting pregnant when they have only been calved as little as 3 weeks.
- Spray paint the leg that is lame if we are coming out to treat lame cows. Sometimes the cow that is very obviously lame walking along the track can mask that lameness once she is stirred up and on concrete.

**Calf deaths after difficult calvings**

A recent large scale study from dairy farms in Colorado, USA, found that calf still births and deaths within the first 24 hr period after being pulled by the farmer or the vet was at 8%. It should be between 1-3%.

Calves that are at risk of being born dead or dying in the first 24-hour period after being pulled include:

- Any calf that requires farmer or vet assistance to be delivered
- Large birth weight calves
- Twins or triplets
- From mothers that have a long labour
- Immature/ premature calves
- Calves coming back feet first
- Traumatized during the birthing process i.e. broken legs, swollen face, broken ribs (21% of calves pulled with a jack have broken ribs compared to 0% when delivered by caesarean)
- Those calves that appear yellow at the time of birth (this is called meconium staining and indicates calf stress in the uterus)

**A check list** to follow when pulling calves to try and reduce the number of deaths includes:

- Remove the membranes from the muzzle of the calf
- Removed mucous and fluid from the mouth by using your fingers to scoop it out
- Sit the calf up on its sternum (never hang a calf up by its back legs or swing it around)\*
- The calf should take a breath within 30 seconds (you can stimulate the calf to breathe by placing your finger or a piece of grass/ straw in the nose and rub the calf's head and chest with towels)
- Check for broken ribs or limbs

- The calf should lift its head by itself within 5 minutes
- The calf should be able to maintain the sitting position by itself within 15 minutes
- Check for congenital defects i.e. umbilical hernia, mouth defects
- Dip or spray the umbilical cord with iodine or chlorhexidine
- The calf should stand within 2 hrs and suckle shortly thereafter
- Correctly ID and record the calf and mother
- Ensure adequate colostrum intake (3L within 2 hours after birth)

\* Traditionally after a calf has been born it was hung up its back feet, as it was thought to remove fluid from the calf lungs. Some of the fluid does come from the mouth and lung regions but majority comes from the stomach of the calf, which does not need to be removed. The main concern in hanging the calf up by the back legs is that the calf is unable to take the deep breath that is required to correctly inflate the lungs with air.

## Disbudding calves

We are disbudding more calves each year and our technique is improving all the time. We are now using a big gas bottle to heat the dehorner as the small hand-held dehorner were not able to heat up quickly enough to do a good job.

Disbudding is a stressful and painful procedure and can be detrimental to the calf's welfare. It is important to provide a painless procedure that has a minimal effect on the calf's welfare and growth.

We prefer to disbud calves between 2 and 8 weeks of age. Younger calves are a little easier to do so if calving is dragged out, we prefer to do the calves in batches.

Note: The vets may leave calves that have been sick or are unwell at the time of the disbudding visit until next

visit to give the calves time to get over their illness.

The procedure can be carried out by the vets, and you do not have to be present. Just let the vets know which calf group they will be disbudding on the day. We prefer to have them penned in groups of 15- 20.

Our procedure to disbud calves is: -

1. Sedate calves with xylazine so that they look as if they are sleeping
2. Inject local anesthetic to block the nerves that supply the horn bud
3. Administer a dose of long-acting anti-inflammatory (Metacam)
4. Burn the horn buds
5. Apply a topical antiseptic spray to the burnt horn bud

At the time of disbudding we also examine calves for umbilical issues, pink eye infections and to remove extra teats.

We can also ear notch calves for pestivirus (the cost of the ear notch test is not included in the disbudding program).

Veterinary disbudding will aid in getting your calves through a stressful period with minimal effect on growth rates and milk intake. **Cost per calf: \$8.80 (GST inc.)**

## Calf rearing tip

There is good evidence to suggest that an animal which has a good start in the calf shed, will subsequently have a longer and more productive milking life.

A significant time in a calf's development is around weaning – when being able to absorb nutrients solely from solid feed becomes essential.

This is achieved by encouraging growth and development of the rumen early on – from a small sac with a

smooth internal lining, to a much larger sac with papillae or small projections that act to increase surface area for nutrient absorption.

There are three essential ingredients to encourage healthy rumen development and function:

**-Water:** should be available to all calves from birth. It is essential for the rumen to function and encourages consumption of more grain/concentrates. In fact, calves not offered water gained 38% LESS weight than calves with constant access to water.

**- Grain/Grain based concentrates:** Papillae growth is stimulated by the presence of volatile fatty acids (VFA's) – the major breakdown products of grain and grain-based concentrates. Small quantities should be introduced from day one.

**- Fibre:** Promotes the growth of the rumens muscular layer and helps maintain papillae health. It should be made available from about day 3 of life. A source of fibre that is different to the bedding is beneficial as it reduces the ingestion of contaminated bedding that may lead to disease.

It is no longer recommended to offer poor quality straw as a fibre source, as this will decrease appetite and limit concentrate intake necessary for papillae development – instead, a fibre source such as chopped hay is a suitable alternative.

## Put a halter on cows with a prolapsed uterus

Cows with a prolapsed uterus die when they have to walk a few hundred metres to a crush. The prolapsed uterus bounces up and down as the cow walks. This can tear the main blood vessels in the uterus and the cow bleeds to death very quickly.

Put a halter on any cow with a prolapsed uterus and tie it to a post, a tractor or ute. It is possible to put a prolapsed uterus back into a cow that is standing in a paddock.