

# 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 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%. Unassisted calving would normally 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
- Remove 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 of high-quality colostrum (Brix  $\geq$  22%) within 2 hours after birth).

\* Traditionally, after a calf had 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.

## Cut udder/ milk vein

Lacerations (aka cuts) of the large milk vein in cattle have the potential to result in life- threatening blood loss and should be considered a medical emergency. Given the size of these veins, damage can result in the rapid loss of blood, becoming fatal within a short period of time.

In the event of these injuries, it is important to seek veterinary treatment as soon as possible.

Immediate measures to stop blood loss can be taken, such as using a

bulldog clip to clamp the area and stop the bleeding (photo below). It is a good idea to put a bulldog clip on the motorbike/ side-by-side and one in the dairy, so they are handy when needed.



Once a vet can assess the cow, a purse string suture will be placed around the injured site with appropriate restraint.

At the time of veterinary treatment, the cow may be put on a course of antibiotics to prevent infection around the vein.

In cases where a severe amount of blood has been lost, animals may be anaemic and require a blood transfusion.



Clinical signs associated with anaemia in cattle include pale mucous membranes (can be checked on the vulva, gums or sclera around the eyes), lethargy/weakness, elevated heart rate and respiratory rate, and exercise intolerance. If anaemia is suspected, a blood sample can be taken to measure the packed cell volume (PCV). This is a measure of the proportion of red blood cells that the cow has. A PCV of less than 15% would indicate a blood transfusion is required.

Following treatment, cows should be kept close by with limited activity to reduce the risk of suture breakdown and monitored for any ongoing blood loss or infection of the site.

## 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.

## IV fluid bags shortage



There is a shortage of fluid bags affecting both veterinary and human health services. Contributing factors include increased demand, production delays, and logistical challenges, such as delays in receiving shipments from overseas. This shortage is expected to continue until the end of the year.

We frequently use IV fluid bags to hydrate sick, scouring calves. Our vet will triage sick calves and administer IV fluids only to those that are severely ill (e.g., dehydrated, unable to stand, and lacking a suckle reflex). Less severely ill calves will be managed with oral fluids.

Thank you to Sheridan, University of Sydney final year veterinary student, for her contribution to this month's newsletter.

