Rochester Veterinary Practice August 2025

NEWSLETTER

In this issue:

Seasonal reminders:

- Put a halter on down cows with a prolapsed uterus as soon as you find them. When cows get up and walk the prolapsed uterus stretches and bangs into the cow's hocks.
- 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.

- Use Vetrelyte-ZB calf electrolyte for scouring calves. Feedback from calf rearers who use Vetrelyte-ZB is that it is a superior product for treating dehydrated calves.
- Plan for spring calves to be veterinary disbudded. Ideally calves should be disbudded between 2 to 6 weeks of age. The calves should be fasted (off milk/food) for at least 4 hours prior to disbudding.

Newly qualified vet nurses

Congratulations to our vet nurses, Sarah and Alyssa, on completing their Certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing. Both have worked incredibly hard, and we're so proud of their dedication and commitment to advancing their skills. Well done, Sarah and Alyssa!

New Vet Dr Maddy Ciacia

This month we will be welcoming Dr Maddy to our vet team. Dr Maddy is originally from Canberra but completed the Bachelor of Veterinary Biology / Bachelor of Veterinary Science at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga in July 2025. Whilst completing her veterinary degree, Dr Maddy worked on a dairy farm near Wagga Wagga.

Dr Maddy veterinary interests include dairy cattle medicine, small animal surgery and endocrinology. Outside of vet, Dr Maddy competes in eventing, plays football and enjoys spending time with her dog Betty!

Drs Ash and Frankie get memberships… Again

Both Ash and Frankie undertook another series of examinations to become a member of the Australian and New Zealand College of Veterinary Scientists.

Ash previously completed fellowship exams in Dairy Cattle Medicine and Management (2020) and this time completed memberships in Medicine of Beef Cattle.

Frankie previously completed membership exams in Medicine of Sheep (2023) and this time completed memberships in Animal Nutrition (Ruminant).

Membership of the College should signify the following:

"The candidate is expected to demonstrate a high level of interest and competence in a given area of veterinary activity. This is judged by that standard of knowledge and understanding, practical skills, attitude, methodology and communication which would make the person suitable to give professional advice to veterinary colleagues not similarly qualified on problems or procedures often encountered or used in general practice, in the relevant area of veterinary endeavour"

We congratulate both Ash and Frankie on these mighty achievements!

Uterine pessaries

It seems logical to treat cows with retained afterbirth with pessaries in the uterus to try and reduce the chance of infection. Studies have shown that in many cases pessaries do not help cows with retained afterbirth and maybe even make things worse.

It may be that pessaries can slow the "rotting" process of the afterbirth and increase the time that the afterbirth is retained. It is thought that the presence of antibiotics in the uterus decreases the production of white cells in the uterus as well as reducing the effectiveness of white cells in the uterus.

There is more and more evidence that the best treatment for cows with retained afterbirth is to do nothing unless the cow is sick (has a temperature above 39.4^0 C). If the cow is unwell then she should be treated with an injectable antibiotic such as Oxytet. If she is very sick, then she will benefit from veterinary help with anti-inflammatory drugs or fluids.

If you want to use pessaries, we recommend that you: -

- Administer them within the first week of calving while the cervix is open, and they are easily introduced.
- Do **not** use them when the afterbirth is still present.
- Give cows that are not well injectable antibiotics.

In general, we recommend the following treatment protocol for dirty cows: -

- Retained membranes should be left to rot out and not removed with force.
- Pessaries should not be used until the afterbirth has come away.
- Metricures are the best treatment for cows that have a surface infection (Endometritis) in the uterus (white pus) and should be used between 1 and 6 weeks after calving.
- Injectable antibiotics should be used in cows that are sick with a brown/red vaginal discharge (Metritis)

Metacam, mastitis and fertility

Studies into the effect of using the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) Metacam in cases of mastitis have yielded some interesting results for cow fertility.

A 2009 study in New Zealand found that cows with mastitis that received a dose of Metacam (along with standard antibiotic therapy) were **42%** less likely to be culled. The most likely reason was that fewer of these cows were empty at the end of the season.

Subsequent studies have confirmed that this reduced culling rate is due to improved fertility - with a **10% improvement in first service conception rate,** a reduction in the number of required inseminations and **increased probability of cows being in calf at 120 days** post calving.

Most of the mastitis cases were at or around calving so we are not sure of the exact mechanism, but it may have something to do with the effect on the oocyte when the cow has mastitis.

It is important to note that in these studies the mastitis was mild clinical mastitis where the cow was not sick.

There is also evidence to suggest that Metacam has positive effects on the outcome of mastitis treatment – Metacam used with an antibiotic was found to result in a 16% improvement in bacteriological cure rates when compared to antibiotic alone. This means more cows can eliminate the causative bacteria from their udders.

It has always made sense to give cows that are sick a dose of Metacam but now we have good evidence that all cows with clinical mastitis will benefit from treatment.

Zinc sulphate footbaths

Purpose of foot bathing:
1) Hardening of hooves – reduce the severity and incidence of hoof lesions.
2) Control of Footrot.
3)Control of Bovine Digital Dermatitis (BDD).

Chemical: Zinc Sulphate Heptahydrate (white crystal powder) – comes in 25kg bags.

Mixing rate: 10% solution – 1kg Zinc Sulphate added to 9L of water.

Ideal length of footbath: At least 3m (so each cow steps in the bath twice with each foot).

Footbath size: Calculating volume of Litres = length (m) x width (m) x fill height (m) x 1000.

Ideal depth of footbath solution: 10 cm (cover up to the dew claw)

Footbath changing frequency: Solution needs to be changed every 200-300 cows (depends on how dirty the cow's feet are).

Foot bathing frequency: Dry weather = Once daily, wet weather = Twice daily.

Weaning dairy calves

The decision to wean calves is often based on several factors: Age, weight, concentrate intake or a combination of all 3. Although age and weight are common criteria used to wean calves, the most appropriate criteria is *concentrate intake*.

Weaning based on concentrate intake allows a faster physiological development without any negative impact on rumen development, weight gain or health status.

Concentrate consumption (for 3 or more consecutive d) between 0.75 – 1 kg/d of is recommended for Holstein-Friesian calves and 0.5 - 0.75kg/d for Jersey calves. This often coincides with weights of 100 - 120kgs for Holsteins and 80 - 90kgs for Jerseys and crossbreds.

It is also recommended to weigh calves at weaning to have a baseline weight and to assess performance over the preweaning period. Regular weighing is recommended to monitor progress and draft off at risk animals and preferentially feed these animals.

It is also best to avoid husbandry practices, such as disbudding, vaccination and transportation at weaning, as additional stressors can predispose to calves getting sick.

Weaning approaches - compared

Approach	Comments
Gradual	-Smooth transition from pre- to post-weaning nutrition -Carried out over 10 – 20 days (Example - 50 % ↓ in milk intake over 10 - 14 days) -Less stressful than abrupt -Calves may lose weight in the pre-weaning period
Abrupt	-Only indicated once calves are consuming concentrate targets -Not appropriate for calves that have been on a high-volume feeding program -More stressful than gradual -Calves may lose weight in the immediate post-weaning period