

Rural round-up



Sunita McGrath
Senior Large Animal
Vet (West)

Scanning is probably my favourite time of the dairy calendar year – I never seem to get tired of it!

Every morning I get up at what seems like the middle of the night and travel across Southland with my trusty scanner and tub of lube. I get to see some amazing sunrises, meet some great farm workers, hang out with fun colleagues, and fill up the coffee cards I've collected around the district. Days can be long and physically demanding, but I sleep well afterwards.

Pregnancy testing is often a nervous time for farmers. It's like exam day: all their hard work gets put to the test.

I love analysing results afterwards. What went well? What didn't go well? Where can improvements be made? Everyone is always looking for the holy grail of fertility... what could be key on your farm?

Also, the surge in wearable cow tech has created new opportunities to help improve repro performance, which is always interesting to review at scanning time.

There are so many elements to get right to achieve great results, and it's a year-long process. Some things are unfortunately out of your control too, like our Southland weather.

In my many years of being a dairy vet, I've seen the best results on farms that provide good quality feed everyday. So, ensure every mouthful of feed is a good one! Keeping cows at the right body condition score throughout the season helps them get back in-calf quickly and maintain pregnancy, and can negate some of the effects of bad weather.

If you want some advice or analysis of your scanning results, get in touch with your KeyVet. We all enjoy this part of pregnancy testing.

Condition counts: Score now for scanning success

by Donna Hamilton

With tuppung coming up, it's time to go through your ewes (if you haven't already) to identify any lighter ones and get them ready for the ram.

Light ewes at mating will have worse lambing performance come spring. Ewes should be at body condition score (BCS) 3-3.5 for tuppung.

What does BCS 3-3.5 look like? Well, if there is more than 6 weeks' wool on the sheep, you will have to FEEL to get the full picture. To do this:

1. Place your hand with the thumb on top of the spine and fingers along the short ribs (flank area).
2. With your thumb, you should be able to feel the spine, but not particularly easily.
3. With your fingers, use moderate pressure to feel the short ribs. The muscle between these bones should be flat to round (not hollowed).



Learn what a 3 feels like! Animals will fit into two categories from there:

- Category 1 – BCS 3 or above, which require maintenance feeding.
- Category 2 – Below BCS 3, which require increased quality and quantity of feed.

Pulling out your lower scoring ewes will have a big impact on them. Being in a smaller mob will help, as well as improved nutrition. They can gain more weight with high quality feed. Putting this into light ewes will be more profitable than fattening lambs.

Some farms have drastically increased their scanning percentages simply by adding in body condition scoring to their animal health calendars and keeping records of these for culling purposes.

ON-FARM FOCUS



DAIRY



- Herd and heifer re-check scans.
- Schedule your pre-drying off PP+ trace element tests for cows.
- Ensure adequate trace element supplementation for calves.
- BCS cows ahead of drying off (aim for a 4.5 average) – lighter cows may need to dry off early.
- Sort Lepto vaccination and consider vaccinating against Salmonella.
- Book a dry cow consult with us to create a drying off plan.

BEEF



- Pregnancy scanning.
- Check copper and selenium levels in both cows and calves.
- Clostridial vaccine booster shots.

SHEEP



- Supplement ewes with iodine ahead of mating.
- Test ewe selenium levels pre-mating.
- Top up lamb B12 levels, as supplements from tailing time will now be used up.
- Autumn drench check (FEC test) for lambs.

DEER



- BCS hinds and preferentially feed.
- Wean fawns.
- Drench fawns for lungworm.
- Stag rut management.

WORKING DOGS



- Feed a high-protein, high-fat diet to support endurance and recovery.

A spotlight on scanning

by Georgia Lammie

It certainly has been a busy start to 2026... by late February, our production animal teams across Southland and Otago had pregnancy scanned a total of 138,776 dairy cows and 20,573 dairy heifers! There have been untold early morning starts, too many long days to count, warm summer weather, miserable wet moments, stunning sunrises, amazing Aurora Australis experiences, and (as always) plenty of laughs.



Test trace elements with PP+



by Brad Shaw

Trace element testing can seem like an expensive investment, but it's an important part of getting the best performance out of a dairy herd.

Production Profile Plus (PP+) is our dairy trace element monitoring programme. It aims to simplify the monitoring process, lower the costs, and give dairy farmers the information they need to make more informed decisions around supplementation.

Through the programme, we do blood and liver tests at key times of the year to check trace element levels: pre-calving, pre-mating, and pre-drying off.

The dry season is quickly approaching! Checking the trace elements of your animals before dry-off is vital to ensure you set them up well for winter. Over the winter, they will usually be off the doseatron, while also growing a

calf inside of them. These combined factors mean they'll need to use their stored trace elements. We want them to remain at ideal levels over winter, to ensure they hit the ground running when they calve and return to the milking herd in the new season.

If you're on our PP+ programme, we'll come out in March/April to take blood and liver samples from a small selection of your herd. We then test these for copper, selenium and magnesium.

With these test results, your KeyVet can have a chat with you about how to target the right treatment for your animals, ensuring you only supplement what is required and get the best value for your money spent.

If you're not on our PP+ programme yet, call us to sign up. Or, you can also book us in for one-off trace element testing ahead of dry-off.

Dry-off nutrition

There are many changes that occur in a dairy cow to transition her from a lactating cow into a dry cow – the main two being: milk production needs to slow down to ideally 5-10L per cow per day before drying off, and the rumen needs to adapt to a dry cow diet. Therefore nutrition is essential at dry-off time.

Reducing the amount of high-protein feed in the diet (e.g. fresh grass, high quality silage) and replacing this with low-protein bulky feeds to keep them content (e.g. whole crop silage, low quality baleage) will help when trying to slow down milk production ahead of drying off.

Scan for a refresher of feeding around dry-off.



The autumn parasite flush

by Donna Hamilton

The official start of autumn not only marks the end of summer (did it even begin?) but also the time we expect to see the highest burdens of internal parasites in grazing animals.

Over the previous 6-7 months, we have had lots of parasite factories (lambs and calves) grazing our pastures. These young animals do not yet have an immunity to parasites and provide high levels of contamination onto the pastures.

Autumn weather also provides an excellent environment for parasite eggs to hatch and for larval development.

One thing we hear from farmers is that they want to “challenge their replacement stock” so that they develop a good immunity. However, it is very important not to put undue pressure on these stock, as they may become sick or stressed and put so much energy into surviving the challenge that their immunity is not able to develop.

In most New Zealand farming systems, the key is to keep the parasite intake low enough to allow great health, and strong immunity development. They only need a tiny level of exposure to achieve this.

Autumn is the perfect time to strategically use a ‘novel’ or ‘knock out’ drench, such as Startect for sheep, or Zolvix Plus for sheep and cattle. It is basically a ‘clean-out’ drench used to kill any parasites that have survived previous drenches.

Parasites are particularly cunning. They are in-sync with pasture growth, and it is no coincidence that they are ready to infect at the same time the pasture has regrown and is ready for grazing. Whenever possible, don’t follow lambs with lambs or calves with calves.

Different parasite species will dominate at different times of the year. *Trichostrongylus* (Trichs) love a good autumn! Consider doing an autumn drench check, as earlier checks may not have picked up this parasite. We recommend doing a drench check at the start, middle and end of the season.

We’re happy to discuss any of these points with you at any time – please get in touch if you’d like more guidance relating to your farm’s situation.

Do you need to do larval cultures?

by Donna Hamilton

You may have been asked by us, or on the faecal egg count (FEC) submission sheet, if you would also like to do a larval culture (LC) on the faecal samples you bring in to us... but, is it necessary?

What is an LC?

This is when faecal samples are cultured at the lab to see what type of worms are present. They hatch the eggs and count the different types of larvae (e.g. *Ostertagia*, *Trichostrongylus*, *Haemonchus*), and then let us know what percentage each one represents in the sample.

These parasites lay eggs that are practically the same, so they can’t be differentiated in just a FEC (which simply counts the number of eggs present).

Why would you want to know?

Knowing this level of detail adds further clarification to a FEC test and enables you and your KeyVet to understand more about what is happening on your farm.

When we know which parasites you’re dealing with, we can help you target them more effectively.

When should you get them done?

Parasite populations change over the season, which can affect our recommendations.

We encourage doing them at the same time as a pre-drench FEC test (especially if you are going to do a drench check 7-14 days later), to find out which parasites are present before drenching. Then do them again as part of your post-drench check to see which parasites have survived.

What do you need for an LC?

Usually we can do an LC with the same samples you bring in for a FEC. Sometimes we may need more samples, but we would let you know. Or, feel free to call your KeyVet to find out.

Pre-weaning prep for beef calves



by Chanté Kritzinger

Weaner sales are coming up, which means it’s time to get prepped for a successful beef calf weaning. Here are some things you can do now to ensure great results both at the saleyards and for your replacement heifers.

- **Make high quality feed available early on** to encourage calves to transition onto this while their mothers are still around. This will help rumen development, and digestion of solid feed will be more efficient come weaning day. Well-fed calves will also develop stronger frames, ripe for strong finishing in future.

- **Perform stressful procedures well before weaning**, such as disbudding.
- **Consider giving trace elements** (e.g. selenium, B12 and copper) to avoid deficiencies, which can stunt growth and immunity.
- **Vaccinate against clostridial diseases** to prevent sudden death of good quality calves later. Give two injections, 4-6 weeks apart.
- **Regularly weigh your calves** to confirm their growth rates are tracking well. We can bring portable scales out to your farm with our Weigh It Up programme.
- **Get some faecal egg count tests done** through us to determine if a pre-weaning drench is needed. If so, use a triple combination oral drench to slow the development of resistance.

Reach out to your KeyVet for advice on low-stress weaning specific to your farming set-up if you’d like further help. Let’s minimise the growth check and return more profit to your pocket!





Celebrating three vet-erans

by Kerryn Gillan

During Southern Field Days, we raised a glass for an awesome large animal vet trio, who have collectively stacked up 65 years of service with us.

Fleur Barker freed her diary from fondling rams to recognise her 30th anniversary (she started in January 1996), Bianca Mackintosh stepped back from scanning cows to celebrate 20 years with us (she started in January 2006), and Lisa Roberts made it off-farm to mark 15 years working here (she started in January 2011). That's a pretty amazing innings from these three top ladies from our East team.

It's a real privilege to work alongside vets who've dedicated so many years to caring for you and your animals. Long service isn't just about time, it's about the relationships they've built, the trust they've earned, and the countless animals they've helped along the way. We're so lucky to have such a great team across the business, and these ladies have been at the forefront of that team for so long now. Thanks for all those years, and here's to many more!



Fleur



Bianca



Lisa

Last chance to be in to WIN a \$500 VetSouth voucher!

It's been 18 months of VetSouth's Paddock Press newsletter and we're keen to hear your thoughts to help us keep it useful and interesting for you.

Fill out our short survey about the newsletter by scanning the QR code below and go in the draw to WIN a \$500 VetSouth voucher for products or services!*

Scan for the survey



*T&Cs apply. One entry per client. Survey closes on Sunday 8th March and winner will be contacted via phone by Sunday 15th March.

Clinic corner



Fun at Field Days

We had a fantastic time at Southern Field Days last month, catching up with clients and making connections with potential new ones. We survived the hottest day of the summer on the Thursday – our East Hub Manager coming to the rescue with a fan for our site and more bottles of water! We loved seeing the excitement of our daily prize pack winners, and after the event was over, we drew the lucky winner of our water blaster and VetSouth voucher major prize, who was thrilled. Thank you to everyone who stopped by to see us.



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