

Rural round-up



Fleur Barker
Senior Large Animal
Vet (East)

I'm finding it a bit hard to believe, but I have recently clocked up 30 years working at VetSouth, which got me thinking about what brought me here and what has kept me here all this time.

Having grown up on a sheep and beef farm in Nelson, I wanted to return to the South Island after graduating and work somewhere that still had a strong connection to the industry. Southland offered that and, despite a huge swing to dairy, still does.

When I first came down to view the job at Gore Veterinary Supplies (as it was known back then) it snowed – in December! Despite the cool start, I moved down and became embedded in the local West Otago community.

I've brought up my family here and have awesome clients and colleagues, many of whom have become great friends.

Working for a larger practice has also meant I've met many vets from all over the world, which I've enjoyed hugely.

I joined the team as a quiet, young graduate and the only woman among six vets. I was probably the first female vet many farmers in the area had encountered, and in some ways marked the start of the women's 'movement' at VetSouth. I'm sure a few farmers had their doubts when this girl turned up, but they were (mostly) always welcoming and supportive.

A lot has changed over the past three decades, both in farming and in veterinary practice, but the sense of community has remained constant.

I continue to love the area, enjoy working in rural southern practice and the variety the job brings.

Baleage wrap: A cautionary tale of two cows

by Keryn Cresswell

The following tales of two cows who ingested baleage wrap are an important reminder to all farmers to be careful what you do with the plastic when opening bales, particularly as we head into winter. Cattle, sheep and deer are all at risk of mistaking any scrap pieces left in the paddock for something edible and this can cause big problems.

A short while ago, I was asked to carry out a post-mortem exam on a cow that had bloated and died earlier in the day.

This was a cow that I had seen before for a severe pinkeye infection, and she was quite blind in both eyes. However, she was not expected to die from that! She had been pregnancy scanned the day before, so I also had to consider the possibility of a perforated rectum.

When I opened the abdomen, there was no sign of a perforation or peritonitis, but the intestines were very empty and gassy, and the stomach contents were unusually watery.

In the chest, the oesophagus (which takes food from the mouth to the rumen)



was four or five times the normal size. The top section of it was full of chewed up grass, but lower down, I found the end of a bit of baleage wrap...

A tangle of baleage wrap was thoroughly wedged at the point where the oesophagus passes through the diaphragm and into the rumen. When something like this happens, the cow can't burp out gas, which causes pressure on the heart, lungs and large blood vessels in the chest.

Death then occurs due to asphyxiation and/or circulatory failure, which was what had happened to this poor cow.

A couple of weeks later, on a different farm, I went with Emma (one of our new graduate vets) to see a heifer that had suddenly gone off her milk and looked tucked up in the guts.

She was quite agitated and kept going down in the crush. There were no faeces present in the rectum when I put my arm in, but she passed a small amount of very watery diarrhoea later.

Continue reading on next page ▶

ON-FARM FOCUS



DAIRY



- Heifer teat sealing begins.
- Monitor BCS and dry off light cows.
- Test for Johne's at final herd test.
- Have an Annual Milk Quality Review with us (formerly a Dry Cow Consult).
- Prep for dry-off and plan your cull list.
- Schedule some pre-winter trace element tests for heifers.
- FEC test calves and drench if necessary.
- RSVP for your local Repro Round-Up!

BEEF



- Pregnancy scanning continues.
- Weaning.
- Test trace elements ahead of winter.

SHEEP



- Mating underway.
- Drench check stock (10 samples, 7-14 days after drenching) – parasites change during the different seasons, so it's important to do multiple drench checks each year.

DEER



- Stag rut management.
- Test copper and selenium levels.

WORKING DOGS



- Remember monthly tablets for Sheep Measles prevention.

Otherwise, we couldn't find much on examination (there were no "pings" to indicate a twisted stomach, for example). We discussed the possibility of exploratory surgery to check for an obstruction, but decided to try medical treatment first.

Two days later, there was no improvement, and the farmer asked us to come out and look at her again. The heifer was dehydrated, so we decided to drench her with fluids via a stomach pump. However, the rumen was so impacted that the liquid came straight back out again around the tube!



Case 1: The knot of baleage wrap that had been wedged in the cow's oesophagus.

At this point we decided to risk opening the rumen surgically and searching for a blockage. Opening the rumen isn't something to undertake lightly, due to the potential for contents to leak out and cause peritonitis.

When we got in there, I immediately found the end of a large piece of baleage wrap. In this case, it was blocking the exit from the rumen, so only liquid could pass through.

We removed all of the baleage wrap and, at the time of writing this, the heifer is still alive and doing well.



Case 2: The baleage wrap ball we removed from the heifer's rumen and Emma stitching up the incision.

These two cows aren't unique. Once a grazing animal gets something in their mouth, they find it difficult to spit it out.

We often find baleage wrap inside stock during post-mortems. While small bits don't always cause problems, if it bunches up or lodges in narrow parts of the gut it can be lethal.

Dry-off checklist

- Body condition score herd and either put lighter cows onto once-a-day milking or dry them off early – prioritising condition now will positively impact next season's performance.
- Get pre-drying off PP+ trace element tests done to make sure your stock have the right mineral levels for the dry period.
- Herd test to work out which cows have high cell counts, helping you make decisions around culling and Dry Cow Therapy (DCT) vs. teat seal.
- Bulk milk test for parasite exposure levels to see if your cows need drenched.
- Vaccinate against Lepto and consider ordering vaccines for Crypto, Rotavirus and Salmonella.
- Plan dry-off transition (remember to change diet slowly if going onto crops like fodder beet).
- Book with us: an Annual Milk Quality Review, any final scanning sessions, teat sealing, and DCT assistance.

New Crypto vaccine for the toolbox

by Kate Irving

Calf scours are one of the most frustrating problems on-farm to manage. Not only do they result in reduced growth rates and more calf deaths, they also increase the workload of calf rearers and can be disheartening.

There are many infectious causes of scours in calves. A nasty one that can crop up is *Cryptosporidium parvum* (Crypto), a gastrointestinal parasite that can cause watery diarrhoea, reduced appetite, depression and death in young calves up to four weeks old.

Crypto is highly contagious, spreading from calf to calf or via faecal contamination of the environment. This means that once an outbreak starts, it can spread through a calf shed swiftly.

Excitingly, this year a new vaccine is available to protect against Crypto: Bovilis Cryptium.



This vaccine is designed to be administered in the last trimester of pregnancy, between 12 and 3 weeks pre-calving. **For their initial course, cows require two doses, four weeks apart.** This is then followed by a booster shot annually.

It works by allowing the cow to develop antibodies against Crypto, which are then passed to calves via the cow's colostrum. Therefore, great colostrum management is essential for calves to get the full benefit of the vaccine's protection.

We always advocate that prevention is better than cure, which means:

1. Reducing disease load in the environment – lowering stocking densities in pens, isolating sick calves, and disinfecting regularly.
2. Improving calf immunity – ensuring good colostrum quality and quantity, and vaccinating the herd.

Diseases like Crypto can also spread to humans, so it's important to maintain good hygiene practices around calves.

If you are interested in using this new vaccine this year, please get in touch with your KeyVet for more information.

Ready, set, teat seal!

Last year our hard-working tech teams teat sealed over 46,000 heifers across Southland and Otago – and we're gearing up for another big season. We're ready for teat sealing to begin this month, with:



36
vet
techs



8
teat sealing
trailers



180,000
tubes of
teat seal

Ewe focus: Trace elements

by Emma Middlemass

Ensuring adequate trace mineral nutrition is essential for ewe fertility and lamb survival. Two key elements to consider prior to mating and before winter are selenium and iodine.

Selenium plays a vital role in immune function, fertility, and lamb viability.

Southland, as we know, has very deficient soils, meaning pasture alone usually does not meet requirements.

You can check your stock's selenium status with a blood test measuring glutathione peroxidase (GPx). This reflects selenium intake over the previous few months.

- GPx levels <4 - indicate deficiency and ewes should receive additional selenium supplementation.
- GPx levels >10 - ideal for good fertility and adequate selenium intake through pregnancy and over winter.



Selenium supplementation options include long-acting selenium injections, short-acting selenium injections and prills. If you have not tested your ewes in the last 12 months, then any time now is a good time to check their levels.

Give us a call to book in, or consider signing up to our **OviGold programme** to get this covered each year. We can even do them on your trailer if you'd prefer to bring some sheep to the clinic.

Iodine is also important for reproductive performance and lamb development, by supporting thyroid hormone production. Iodine deficiency in ewes can contribute to poor lamb survival, i.e. weaker and smaller lambs and increased lamb death post-birth.

Ewes on crop over winter tend to have lower iodine intake. Ewes on brassicas, e.g. kale or specific clovers, can also get secondary iodine deficiency as these crops produce goitrogens that inhibit the uptake of iodine.

Iodine supplementation options include the long-acting injectable Depodine/ Flexidine and oral drenches, such as RPM pre-tup and 8 weeks and 4 weeks pre-lamb.

If you want to chat about your farm-specific situation, or have any questions about trace elements for your stock, give your KeyVet a call.

Watch out for Hairy Shaker Disease

by Emma Lawson

With tupping fast approaching, Hairy Shaker Disease (HSD) is something to think about.

HSD, or Border disease, is a form of pestivirus in sheep, very similar to Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) in cattle. It is often the cause of poor scanning rates, barren ewes, abortions, stillbirths, and the birth of weak lambs.

This highly contagious disease can be spread from ewe to lamb via the placenta or milk, from ram to ewe during mating, and between ewes via nose-to-nose contact.

Ewes that are infected will not show any clinical signs. The effect of HSD depends on when they are infected:

- Healthy, mature dry sheep – very mild disease, often going unnoticed.
- Ewe in late pregnancy (i.e. more than 85 days) – lamb born normally with antibodies to the virus.
- **Ewe in early pregnancy (i.e. less than 85 days) – abortion or live 'hairy shaker' lamb.**

A hairy shaker lamb is often small and underdeveloped and will have a coarse shaggy coat, tremor involuntarily, and be weak or uncoordinated. These lambs have a very poor survival rate, with most dying shortly after birth.

Those that survive are 'persistently infected' with the virus, which means they will continue to shed the virus, and infect other animals, for the rest of their life. Unfortunately, there is no treatment or vaccination available in New Zealand for HSD.

So, if an outbreak occurs:

1. Cull all lambs showing hairy shaker characteristics.
2. Test introduced stock to identify any 'persistently infected' animals.
3. Cull ewes that produce hairy shaker lambs in two consecutive years.

Maintaining a closed flock is the best way to prevent the disease, as ewes that are bought-in pose the greatest risk. If you need to bring ewes in, they should ideally be quarantined and tested, joined separately, and kept apart from the main flock until lambing.

A significant season for Vitamin B1 deficiency

With our 'non-summer' summer, we have seen a marked increase in incidence of neuro disease caused by Vitamin B1 (or Thiamine) deficiency in lambs and calves this season.

The most common time we see it is when animals are moved on to, or off, a paddock of lush grass.

If you suspect you have had B1 deficiency this season, please don't hesitate to contact us to chat about treatment and possible prevention strategies.

Did you know?

Male lambs have higher parasite egg counts than female lambs. That's a good reason to get rid of male store lambs earlier!



The team behind the team

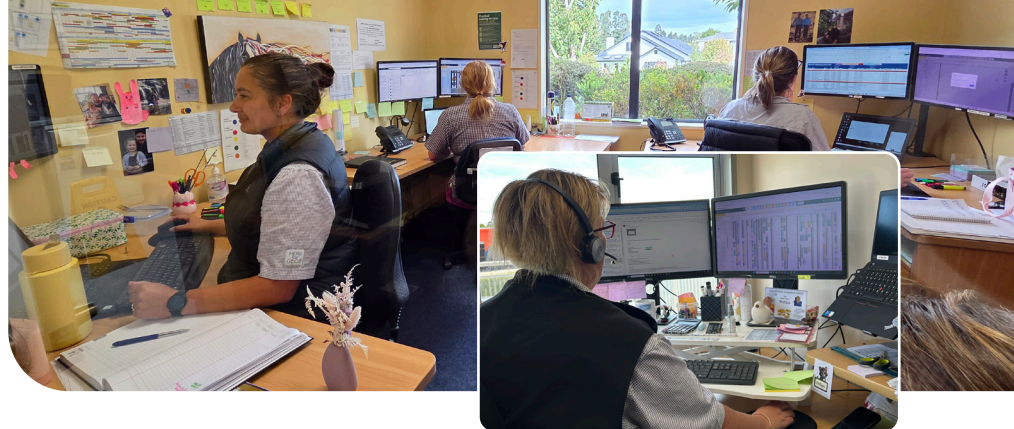
by Rachael Buckingham & Georgia Lammie

Our vets might be the faces you see on-farm, but there's a whole team working behind the scenes to keep everything running smoothly.

Part of this wider team is Farm Services, whose role is to make things easier for both farmers and vets by doing the groundwork that allows the vets to focus on practical animal health work as much as possible.

They manage all vet and vet tech calendars, booking routine visits, organising appointments for core services such as pregnancy scanning, and coordinating the likes of the recent Ram Run.

Collectively, they handled over 11,230 phone calls in the past year. That's more than 322 hours on the phone, or eight 40-hour working weeks! Imagine



if the vets had to make all those calls – they'd never get on the road!

As well as scheduling routine work, they also act like a triage for emergency animal doctoring. As the first port of call for farmers, they have to figure out what's most urgent, which vets are available, and who to send where, whilst ensuring you have access to the animal health care you need when you need it.

As one team member puts it: "We make sure the vet or vet tech arrives at the right place, with the right equipment and medication, and ready for the job at hand."

The benefit of calling Farm Services, as opposed to ringing your KeyVet, is that they can get onto things straight away, whereas your vet might literally be up

to their armpit in work! You can also make multiple bookings in a single call, saving yourself some admin too.

Beyond bookings, they also provide support with reporting and charging, and help to organise events such as Repro Round-Up dinners, Dairy Winter Workshops and SBD Vet Yarns.

In short: "We're the people on the end of the phone that make life easier for farmers and vets."

So, whenever you need to get a vet out on-farm, give Farm Services a call and they'll get you sorted!

Call the West Farm Services team on: 03 236 6090 ext. 2

Call the East Farm Services team on: 03 209 0101 ext. 2

Clinic corner



Marking a memorable milestone

Last month we celebrated Mark Bryan, as his time working in the business came to an end. We farewelled him with great food and drinks, wonderful speeches from current staff, ex staff, and long-term clients, and ceilidh dancing into the night!



Good fun in the Gorge

The VetSouth Gorge Adventure Race was an awesome day out in March. The weather behaved itself, the atmosphere was fantastic, and – from the fast and competitive teams to those just out there for a good laugh with friends – it seemed like everyone had a great time. We love to support events like this which get people out into our epic 'backyard' and raise funds to give back to the local community.



Save the date for Repro Round-Up

We're excited to once again invite our dairy farming clients to Repro Round-Up, our annual dinner to celebrate the end of the season.

It's our way of saying thank you for using our services, while also looking at how the season has gone through the repro data we've rounded up.

Come along to dinner in Gore, Balclutha or Winton for a great evening – mark the date for your clinic's event on your calendar now. More details to follow soon.

Gore - Tuesday 5th May
Balclutha - Wednesday 6th May
Winton - Thursday 7th May

Working with you

Keep your animals happy and healthy with our expert teams in **Winton, Gore, Invercargill, Tapanui, Balclutha, Otautau, Lumsden, Clydevale & Milton**

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