

## Rural round-up



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As the weather starts to cool and the nights get darker earlier, it's a sign that winter is coming... my favourite season. It isn't just my favourite because of the cosy heat of a fire, but more so because it means heifer teat sealing and herd dry-offs are in full swing.

As a Vet Technician, one of my many key tasks is the insertion of intramammary sealant in heifers, and sealant and antibiotics in cows. I reckon heifer teat sealing is the best job that techs do. Being out on farm, working as a group, and the feeling of pride when you smash out a big mob of heifers in less time than expected can't be beaten – plus, farmer's smoko shouts at the end of jobs are always a bonus!

Improving animal health is the most important aspect of our jobs. By getting heifers teat sealed, you are ensuring that those heifers have the best chance at starting their milking careers with healthy, infection-free udders.

Drying off herds is just as enjoyable as heifer teat sealing. We work closely with the farmer and their workers, working together towards the goal of improving the herd's milk quality for the next season. It's a great feeling being part of their farm team.

Over here in the East (Gore, Tapanui, Balclutha and Clydevale), we start teat sealing and drying off in late March and don't finish until June.

Remember to ensure we have the correct details and numbers we need for these sessions. A great way of informing us is through your Annual Milk Quality Review with your KeyVet (formerly called Dry Cow Consults), which are happening now.

## Lepto: Why vaccination is key

by Oli Rowlands

**Leptospirosis (Lepto) is the most common bacterial zoonotic disease in New Zealand – it's easily spread from animals to humans.**

A whole range of livestock can be infected by Lepto, including cattle, sheep, pigs, and even horses. Wild animals such as rats and possums can also transmit the disease.

The bacteria that causes the disease thrives in wet environments and is often spread via direct contact with urine or a contaminated water source. It can enter through cuts, but also through the eyes, nose and mouth.

The impact Lepto can have on farm is considerable - both on livestock and on human health. When infected, people tend to show flu-like symptoms and occasionally require hospitalisation. In livestock, Lepto can cause reduced growth rates, foetal loss, abortion, and even death. However, sometimes animals may show no signs at all, posing a hidden risk to farm workers.

In recent years we have seen some human cases of Lepto on vaccinated farms. These were due to a strain of Lepto called *Pacific*. The Lepto 3-Way vaccine only covers three strains: *Hardjo*, *Pomona* and *Copenhageni*.



With research suggesting that *Pacific* could be present in almost three quarters of NZ dairy herds, the shift towards using the new Lepto 4-Way vaccine, which includes this strain, is needed to reduce the exposure risk.

As well as vaccinating, there are other things you can do on-farm to lower risk:

- Avoid animal urine and spraying effluent.
- Don't eat, drink or smoke/vape when working near animals.
- Wash hands regularly, cover up cuts, and wear gloves/PPE when needed.
- Have good pest control.
- Take care around surface water.
- See a doctor ASAP if you feel unwell.

Vaccination against all four strains of Lepto is the essential first step to preventing Lepto on farm. Ensuring all animals are vaccinated yearly can massively reduce the risk.

If you have any questions about when to vaccinate or how to transition to the new Lepto 4-Way, please get in touch.

## ON-FARM FOCUS



### DAIRY



- Dry off herd and teat seal heifers.
- Manage transition period, focus on nutrition (diet and trace elements).
- Supplement calves with copper, selenium, and B12.
- Complete Lepto vaccination for any stock not vaccinated yet.
- Consider Rotavirus vaccination ahead of calving.

### BEEF



- Test trace elements before pre-winter supplementation.

### SHEEP



- Consider long-acting B12 supplementation, which can assist hoggets through winter.
- Maintain well-conditioned ewes. Weight gain before scanning can increase risk of bearings – however, it may still pay to lift light ewes.

### DEER



- Pregnancy scan hinds.
- Mineral check on dry hinds at works (copper and selenium status).



## Protect your calves from Rotavirus

by Ben Bottcher

Scours is one of the leading reasons for sickness and death in calves, and Rotavirus is a very common cause.

This highly contagious virus can infect calves from birth onwards, with symptoms normally seen around 1-4 weeks of age. The main sign is a

watery, pale yellow diarrhoea. **The virus can spread very quickly through calf sheds, leaving a trail of sick calves.**

Affected calves should be rapidly quarantined and tested. If Rotavirus is the cause, Rotagen powder is often used for treatment. It's dosed through the milk or individually to each calf.

In a situation like this, talking with your KeyVet is a great idea, as they'll be able to give recommendations on quarantine, treatment and prevention options that fit with your farm system.

Prevention is better than a cure. This holds true with this virus, and luckily there are a couple of options for vaccination. **For Rotavirus, vaccinating the cow prior to calving is the best way to prevent an outbreak amongst the calves.** It's much easier and more cost effective than treating sick animals.

Rotavirus vaccines cause the cow to produce antibodies that are then passed on to the calves in your sheds through her colostrum by passive transfer. Because of this, good colostrum management is critical for these vaccines to work.

**We have two options for vaccination: Rotavec Corona and ScourGuard.**

Rotavec only requires a single injection to naive animals, which cuts down on expense and labour, but it only contains

one of the two strains of Rotavirus found in NZ. ScourGuard contains both the G6 and G10 strains of Rotavirus.

Both of these vaccines are good options and will provide cheap insurance against the worst types of scours next calving season.

## Tech talk: Teat sealing

by Niamh Moule & Brittany Buchanan

Vet techs like us are in the thick of our busiest time of year: teat sealing!

Heifers lose the natural keratin plugs in their teats when they come into milk before calving, making them susceptible to picking up bacteria through their open teat canals.

When our teams teat seal a mob of heifers, we insert an internal teat sealant called Dryzen into their teats. This forms a physical barrier that will stay in place until it is stripped out after calving, providing better protection against bacteria.

Our teat seal teams cover a large part of the South. We are running four trailers out of our Winton clinic, two trailers out of our Gore clinic, and one trailer out of our Balclutha clinic. There are 4-5 techs per trailer.

We start our days by getting the Dryzen warming up in chilly bins with hot water bottles, which helps ease insertion. Then we load the truck and trailer, and head out.

Once on-farm, we back the trailer into position and crack into it. We load six heifers at a time, then clean their teats thoroughly with teat wipes and meths-soaked cotton balls to ensure they're as sterile as possible (because Dryzen doesn't contain an antibiotic). We insert the Dryzen into each teat and teat spray the udder.

This process is repeated row-by-row until the whole mob is done. We then clean the trailer and pack up – ready to do it all again tomorrow!

There are many reasons why techs love teat sealing, but the best bits include getting out on-farm, working with our amazing teammates, and playing good music as we work! We enjoy doing a great job for our fantastic clients and their animals.

## Heifers in winter



by Emma Middlemass

The most challenging growing period for livestock is nearly upon us... winter.

Preparing dairy youngstock for wintertime is crucial for maintaining good growth rates and overall health. Here are some key points:

- 1. Growth:** Weigh animals regularly, split mobs by size, and focus on underperformers with targeted feeding in a small group. If diet or weather challenges are expected, it's a good idea to aim above growth targets in autumn to create a buffer and prevent winter setbacks.
- 2. Health treatments:** Use combination drenches to manage parasites, maintain your vaccination schedule for diseases like Lepto and BVD (plus Rotavirus for R2 heifers), and assess trace elements in autumn to help guide an appropriate supplementation strategy. If regular yarding won't be achievable over

winter, are long-acting supplements more suitable?

- 3. Teat sealing:** Teat seal your R2s to significantly reduce your calving mastitis rates. Book this in with us – if changing grazing locations for winter, choose a date when you'll have access to the best facilities.
- 4. Crop transition:** Gradually introduce youngstock to winter crops to allow their gut bacteria to adjust (increase by 0.5kg of dry matter every second day or until they are eating their allocation properly). Balance a crop diet with adequate baleage/hay supplementary feed. Never put youngstock onto crop hungry. Consider issues young animals may have when grazing winter crops, e.g. difficulty eating bulbs, rumen development, and growth requirements.

Good winter planning will ensure your heifers are set up for long-term success!

# Drench check FECs

by Caitlyn Bell

At this time of year, with weather still warm and plenty of moisture around, conditions are ideal for parasite growth.

We provide quick in-house faecal egg count (FEC) testing. Faecal samples can be dropped off to any VetSouth clinic to be analysed by our ParaSight machines in Winton, Gore and Tapanui.

Two of the main FECs we run are:

## Post-Drench Checks: The routine drench check

This FEC is for checking in on your choice of oral drench. 10 faecal samples are required. It's ideal to bring these samples in 10 days after drenching. If your drench is working, you should expect to see zero eggs.

## Drench Interval Checks: The pre-drenching check

We recommend this FEC for checking to see if drenching is required. It can be done at any time of year. Usually samples are brought in 28 days after the last drench. It also requires 10 faecal samples.

For example, a great use of this quick FEC would be if your animals haven't had an oral drench in over four weeks and you'd like to assess the worm burden of the flock before deciding whether to drench or not. You may find that only your bottom cut needs treatment, rather than the entire mob, or that no drenching is needed at all – saving you money on drenching and helping prevent resistance!



We do have the ability to test individual faecal samples or composite faecal samples. However, our preference is individual samples. If the results in the graph below had been a composite sample, they would have indicated a non-performing drench. But the individual results allow us to see that one lamb was potentially missed or spat out the drench!

Use FECs to **test your drench effectiveness**, so you can **target the appropriate treatment (product and timing) and make the most of your animal health spend.**

Sample	Strongyle (eggs per gram)	Nematodirus (eggs per gram)
1	0	0
2	0	0
3	0	0
4	0	0
5	4850	50
6	0	0
7	0	0
8	0	0
AVERAGE	606.25	6.25

## Drench onto winter crop: Do I or don't I?

by Donna Hamilton

We're always pleased when farmers ask, "Should I drench my young stock onto winter crop?", rather than just reaching for the drench gun.

### First – the paddock

A paddock that is 100% crop, fence to fence, with no gullies or unworked knobs, will only host worms if there's grass in the crop. Any rough areas provide a great environment for parasites to thrive. However, if the paddock has been ungrazed for many months, parasite levels may be lower. Though this isn't always the case, as with grazing practices changing, many lambs are now being put onto crop earlier.

### Next – the animals

A high worm burden can add additional stress to a feed change. Consider where the animals have been grazing in the weeks since their last drench. If they were on a paddock with a low larval challenge, they may have a low burden, and vice versa. Keep in mind that drenching only removes the current worm burden. A faecal egg count (FEC) can be a helpful tool in making the right decision.

We're always happy to discuss this with you. We are passionate about ensuring drench is used only when needed to protect its long-term effectiveness on your farm.

## Hoggets in winter



by Angela Butcher

As the days grow shorter and the temperatures start to drop, we need to be looking ahead to our winter stock management.

Hoggets can often struggle in the colder months, especially if they are pregnant. They should still be growing well to ensure they hit their full mature weight as early as possible.

For this reason, your hoggets must be considered priority stock. Now

is the time to assess and plan for things like feed quality, any changes in feed, parasite burdens, and trace element supplementation. The product Vitamin ADE (containing vitamins A, D and E) is a good supplement option – it's sometimes nicknamed 'Liquid Sunshine'.

Get in touch with your KeyVet to have a yarn about some of these factors, as well as potential product options, to ensure your hoggets come through wintertime in great condition.



# Working dog studies

by Hugh Hasselman

Massey University is undertaking a research project called 'Right Dog for the Job'.

They will learn more about the DNA make-up of our New Zealand Huntaway

and Heading dogs, with the objective being to develop breeding options to enhance the health and performance of working dogs.

The researchers are collecting data such as physical measurements, working attributes, and DNA samples from a selection of working dogs. This will be used to produce their genotypes, to **better understand which genetic disorders occur in these dogs and to identify which genes may influence the physical traits, health issues and work performance** of these breeds.

So far, several disease variants have been detected, with two of them being specific recessive genes. One causes a cobalamin (vitamin B12) malabsorption disorder and the other causes a neurodegenerative disorder in young dogs.

Another area of study is seeking to **identify what role genetics may play in the development of the devastating health issues of GDV (twisted stomach) syndrome and dilated cardiomyopathy.**

The goal is to enable selective breeding by offering the use of DNA based testing to farmers and breeders so that they can avoid matings between carriers, thereby reducing the incidence of these genetic disorders.

These studies are an exciting development in working dog health and future farming operations.

## Clinic corner



### Prestigious award for deserving vet

Our very own Mark Bryan is set to receive the prestigious New Zealand Veterinary Association President's Award for 2025!

We are very proud of Mark, as this award recognises meritorious service to the veterinary profession. Mark has had an extensive career dedicated to advancing veterinary science and animal welfare.

In addition, he's volunteered 20 years' service to the NZVA as a Dairy Cattle Veterinarians Committee Member, Board Member and Antimicrobial Resistance Committee Chair.

Mark assists a cow during calving.



Mark has been based in Winton since 1997, initially at Central Southland Vets, which then became VetSouth. Many of our local dairy farmers will have had him out on farm over the years, and he has successfully trained many a skilled vet.

These days he works hard behind the scenes as our Director of Clinical Strategy and, in the 'spare' time he has left, he has been known to volunteer for the Canadian Ski Patrol – and call the occasional Ceilidh dance.

### Sealing the deal with a smile

Check out these photos of some of our heifer teat sealing teams in action last month. Our awesome vet techs are all smiles while getting the job done right!



## Our clinics

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Keep your pets happy and healthy with our small animal teams in Winton, Gore, Balclutha, Tapanui & Invercargill



Proud to support:

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Gore  
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Otautau  
Clydevale