

Rural round-up



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We've geared up for the most intense time of the vet tech calendar: heifer teat sealing and dairy herd dry-offs.

Here in Winton, we run five teat seal trailers. Last year our West tech crews teat sealed 30,062 heifers, and it looks like we're well on track to hit similar numbers again – if not a few more!

During dry-off, we'll also wrangle the vets to help us administer Dry Cow. It's all hands on deck to get herds dried off within a short timeframe.

It may be busy, and a bit chaotic, but it's also one of my favourite times.

When I started at VetSouth, I couldn't believe how many people worked here. How would I ever learn that many names, let alone get to know everyone?

However, it didn't take me long to realise that on the not so fun days – when it's a 3am start, the southern weather is grim, or there's cow poo running down your neck – it's those people you work with and the laughs you have along the way that make it great.

We're lucky to have such an awesome team here in the West, including 11 experienced, full-time techs and 13 casual techs that have come on board for this period. We simply couldn't get through it without these legends!

We know this can be a stressful time on-farm and we want to make it as easy as we can for you. We'll get in touch prior to teat seal and dry-off bookings to confirm numbers and chat through how we can help things run as smoothly as possible.

Some of these details might seem small, but they can make a big difference to how efficiently the jobs go.

All the best as the season wraps up, and I look forward to catching up with some of you on-farm soon!

Bull sales: Key considerations before you buy

by Donna Hamilton

Purchasing the most valuable animals on your farm can be quite a stressful event!

Here are a few things to consider to help you select the right bulls for your herd and ensure they're in top health:

The bull sale catalogues will be in mailboxes and online now. Take your time to read up about the stud breeder you're looking at and make sure they are focused on the same things you need from your cows. It's a good time to give them a call to discuss their philosophy and how they go about running their stock.

You'll find lots of numbers in the catalogues about the animals for sale. If this is all gobbledegook to you, then ask the stud owner to explain it to you, or come in and have a chat with one of our vets. There are likely only a couple of numbers in there that you need to focus on, so work out which ones they are and go from there.

Check on the BVD (Bovine Viral Diarrhoea) status of the bulls. They MUST be BVD blood tested AND vaccinated (two shots). This information



should be in the catalogue, but if not, just ask. This will prevent you bringing in an infected animal, and the vaccine will prevent your cows from giving BVD to the bull and causing illness or infertility for the mating period.

Be very aware of clostridial diseases too. Ensure all your boys on the farm are covered with a clostridial vaccine (preferably a 10-in-1). The cost of the vaccine is nothing compared to your investment and also the health of the rest of your cattle – fattening, replacement, breeding, etc. All of them can be susceptible to a clostridial death and that is a huge waste when we have such useful vaccines available.

Finally, consider selenium and copper for the bulls. You may need to supplement them when you get them home so they're in optimal health come mating time.

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 ahead of winter.
- Complete Lepto vaccination for any stock not yet vaccinated.
- Consider Rotavirus and Crypto vaccination ahead of calving.

BEEF



- Treat for lice if required.
- Test trace elements ahead of winter.

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 dry hinds at works (for copper and selenium status).



Improving milk quality

by Sunita McGrath

Dry-off time is approaching and if you've been struggling with mastitis this season, you'll be glad to see the cows head off down the road or jump on a truck to go to their winter grazing.

You'll be hoping that the Dry Cow and/or teat seal you put in is going to do its job over the dry period and they'll come back all cleaned up of any infections.

However, as much as we'd like to think that will happen, it's not always the case. Wishful thinking doesn't amount

to much when it comes to mastitis! So, if you want to have less mastitis to deal with and better results next season, now is a great time to make a plan.

Improving milk quality does not have to be complicated or expensive. While Dry Cow Therapy is a big part of mastitis control (both antibiotic and non-antibiotic options – like teat sealants), there are many other equally important things that can help. **Small adjustments to management practices on-farm can make a huge difference.**

Last season I worked on this with numerous farms I am the KeyVet for who were aiming to improve their milk quality. My main advice: **Focusing on each cow in the colostrum mob builds the foundations for good udder health.**

Simple things like cleaning each colostrum cow's teats with teat wipes at milking time can have a big effect on bulk milk somatic cell count (BMSCC) and mastitis treatment rates later on in the season.

Effective teat spraying is also key. Mixing the spray up correctly and actually getting it on each cow every milking may sound obvious, but you'd be surprised how few automatic teat sprayers do a great job every day. I'm a big fan of manually teat spraying early on in spring – especially for the colostrum mob. Get that teat skin in

beautiful condition before she goes into the milking herd.

The other part of milk quality which I find has a massive impact on BMSCC and mastitis treatment success is actually knowing what bugs are affecting your herd. For example, if you are dealing with *Staph. aureus*, you may be able to make changes to your systems to help lower the spread of this contagious bacteria between cows.

Our in-house DairySmart Jupiter machines can diagnose bacteria in a milk sample. We have done a lot of these tests this season, helping farmers make decisions around management, treatment, and culling. We now have DairySmart Jupiter high somatic cell count plates available to purchase, for those with their own machines on-farm.

If you're keen to lower your BMSCC, treat less cows for mastitis, and produce more milk next season, utilise milk sample testing and advice from your KeyVet to put together an uncomplicated and effective milk quality improvement plan for your farm.

Analysing phantom cow results



by Christine Utting

Across all the regions we service, we're seeing an increase in dairy farmers keen to do phantom scanning.

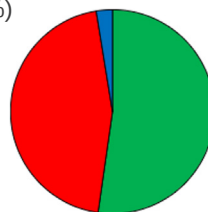
In our East and South Otago hubs (which includes our Gore, Tapanui, and Balclutha clinics), we had 18 farms do at least one phantom scan this season – and several did up to four scans to catch as many phantoms as possible!

The outcomes from these scans:

1. **A total of 11,438 cows were scanned** from late November to early January to identify any phantom pregnancies.
2. **573 cows were phantoms** – a 5% prevalence average across the farms (the range within individual herds was 3-19%).
3. Identified phantoms were **treated either with a CIDR programme (83%) or a PG injection (17%).**

4. At the time of writing this, we had pregnancy test results for 507 of these phantom cows, which showed...

- 265 pregnant (52%)
- 229 empty (45%)
- 13 other (3%) – rechecks or no longer in the herd



This is an improvement on phantom cow results from the East and South Otago last season, where out of 228 phantoms (which was also a 5% prevalence average across the mobs scanned), 47% got pregnant after treatment and 49% ended up empty.

Once again, the results are clear. There is value in scanning for phantoms and intervening while there is still time to get them in-calf.

Heifers in winter

Good winter planning will ensure your youngstock are set up for long-term success. We've put together a guide with a few things to consider to help you maintain good growth rates and overall health in your heifers over winter.

Scan for our tips on management, feeding, and health treatments.



Did you know?

You can drop empty Dryzen tubes (non-antibiotic only) and buckets off at our Winton and Gore clinics to be recycled. They are made into fence posts – reducing plastic waste and contributing to a more sustainable future for the dairy industry.



Prepping ewes for the winter

by Donna Hamilton

So much of the farming year is about preparing stock to winter well. We work on crops, supplementary feed and body condition in almost every month of the year to help ensure they can handle whatever the southern winter throws at them.

Crops

Winter fodder crops are variable this season, particularly in Southland where growing conditions have been fickle. Measuring crops and doing some quick calculations is important to assess feed supply.

Don't forget that sheep need to be introduced to crops gradually. While issues are often less dramatic than in cattle, their rumen still needs time to

adjust. A good approach is to fill them up with baleage before offering a new break. Keeping the rumen functioning well is key to maximising production.

Supplementary feed quality also varies. Identify your best silage or baleage now and save it for later in winter, when ewe intake is limited by pregnancy. At that stage, even a small lift in energy offered can make a noticeable difference.

Parasites

Lice control often occurs in the coming months. When using a small volume product, applied to the back line of the sheep, it's best to do this as soon as possible (within hours) after shearing so that the lanolin can help disperse the product. If using a jetter race, it's best to have a couple of weeks of wool growth before applying the dip.

Scanning

We're seeing growing interest in triplet scanning this year. If you're considering it, make sure you contact your scanner in plenty of time as they'll need to change your timing around slightly.



Most farmers use the information for pre-lamb feeding and management, then spread the triplets amongst the twins for lambing. If you're new to it, you could start by either focusing on one age group or identifying the first 100–300 triplets and marking the rest as multiples.

Scanning is also a useful time to body condition score ewes, so consider working this into your plan too.

If you'd like support with winter planning, get in touch with us.

What the FEC: This season under the microscope



A mixed bag of results

by Donna Hamilton

Looking over this season's faecal egg count (FEC) results, it is fair to say we have seen it all!

Some samples coming through from drench checks have been very good, but only a handful. The majority are showing some leakage, through to high egg counts after drenching. This means

looking at the drenching procedure, checking drench guns and further investigation on drench effectiveness.

We're also seeing a wide range in 28-day FECs. Some lambs on crop still need drenching, while others don't. Meanwhile, those on permanent pasture are also showing a mixed bag of results. It's great to see some farmers are seeing fewer parasites as they have adjusted their grazing management.

One farmer brought in samples from 'big' lambs and 'small' lambs, 28 days after drenching. The 'big' lambs had about half the FEC that the 'small' ones did, despite having been treated the same throughout the season. This highlights the importance of having ewes in good condition to enable them to wean great lambs that grow fast.

What are your wee lambs costing you in terms of feed requirement and pasture parasite contamination?

We have had a few farmers carrying out repeat two-tooth FECs leading into mating to help assess pasture contamination.

The main message is we need to keep monitoring to know what is really going on – guessing doesn't work!

Testing up 38%

by Rachael Buckingham

As more farmers experience drench resistance firsthand, and awareness of the risk of it growing, we are seeing a huge increase in our in-clinic FEC testing.

This year (July 2025 - April 2026), we have done 663 FEC tests through our Parasight machines across our clinics. That is a 38% increase on the 2024-25 year and covers both individual samples and composite tests for sheep, beef and dairy animals.

Testing is an important part of an effective parasite management programme and we are happy to see more farmers checking on the status of their stock instead of just blanket drenching.

As well as helping to prevent drench resistance, testing can be beneficial for your bottom line and time management. You spend so much time and money drenching lambs, you need to know it's worthwhile!



Our Parasight machines use highly sensitive testing technology, so, if there are eggs there, we will find them! They allow us to process FEC tests in-clinic, rather than sending them to an external lab, which means you can get results quicker.



Protect your pack

Essential vaccinations for working dogs

by Massimo Colombaroli

Our annual Dog Run is coming up soon, which means it's time to top up your working dogs' vaccinations. Remember, it's not just puppies that need protection!

Keeping your team healthy, happy, and ready for the job is a top priority. Following a simple vaccination

programme is one of the most effective and straightforward ways to prevent serious diseases that can sideline your best animals.

There are two key vaccines that we recommend your team stays up to date with. These are what we call the 'core' vaccine and canine cough.

'Core' vaccine: Your shield against deadly diseases

The 'core' vaccine helps to protect against severe and often fatal diseases, including:

- Canine distemper
- Infectious canine hepatitis
- Adenovirus respiratory disease
- Parainfluenza
- Canine parvovirus enteritis (parvo)

While we are lucky not to see many cases of parvo locally, thanks to good herd immunity, it remains a serious threat. In areas with lower vaccination rates, parvovirus outbreaks are common and can lead to high costs for treatment (often several thousand dollars per dog), with many not surviving despite intensive care.

Adult dog immunity can fade, so it's crucial to maintain protection with boosters every three years after the initial puppy course.

Canine cough: More than just a nuisance

For a working dog, canine cough (previously known as kennel cough) is a significant problem. This highly contagious respiratory infection can spread rapidly from animal to animal, leading to weeks of lost work and the difficulty of managing multiple sick animals.

While not typically deadly, it causes a harsh cough and lethargy, making a dog unfit for work. An annual vaccination is the best way to prevent this disruption. For those dogs that are considered high risk, such as trial dogs, we recommend every 6 months.

Our vets will be out on-farm next month on our annual Dog Run, administering two key vaccines to your working dogs and checking them over. If you haven't previously been on the Dog Run, and want to be, please give your local clinic a call.

Clinic corner



Sealing has started!

Teat sealing season began last month – check out these photos of some of our vet tech crews in action on-farm.



Local Dairy Industry Awards

Doesn't this lot scrub up well! Some of our team ditched overalls for dresses to head along to the Southland/Otago New Zealand Dairy Industry Awards event. It's awesome to see success in the local dairy industry celebrated.

One of our dairy vets, Tottie, presented the VetSouth award for third place Dairy Trainee of the Year to the recipient, Samantha Withers. Samantha received a voucher from us as part of her prize.

These vouchers were also given in the prizes for the runner up Share Farmer of the Year – Chris Henderson, the first place Dairy Manager of the Year – Lan Bariuad, and the second place Dairy Trainee of the Year – Amy Gouldthorpe. Well done to all these award recipients!



Congratulations to the lucky winner of our newsletter survey prize, Leanne Erb! She was so excited to receive the \$500 VetSouth voucher. Thank you to everyone who took the time to fill in the survey and let us know their thoughts about Paddock Press. We really value your feedback to help us keep the newsletter useful and interesting for you.



Working with you

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

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