

Rural round-up



Zelda Jordan
Southern Regional
Director

Returning to Southland and taking up the role of VetSouth's Regional Director has felt like coming home. While Invercargill has changed, many things that make this part of the world special haven't – strong rural communities, people who look out for one another, and a deep connection to the land and animals that support our region.

Over the past few months, I've been travelling around our clinics and catching up with clients and staff. It's been great to reconnect with familiar faces, meet new ones, and hear honestly about what's happening on-farm and in our communities.

There's no shortage of challenges out there at the moment, whether it's weather, rising costs, staffing pressures or simply the pace of change farmers are dealing with day to day. What has stood out to me most is the resilience and practicality people continue to show, and I see that same attitude in our VetSouth teams.

We understand that farming doesn't stop at 5pm, and neither does the responsibility of supporting our clients and their animals. The willingness of our teams to provide trusted advice and reliable after-hours support remains one of the real strengths of this business.

As we move further into 2026, our focus remains on continuing to provide practical advice, trusted relationships, and high-quality veterinary support in a way that is sustainable for both our clients and our people.

I'm grateful to be back in the South and look forward to continuing to work alongside you all in the years ahead.

Originally from Winton, Zelda has practical experience working with rural communities, including eight years with Fire and Emergency New Zealand and roles across the healthcare and rural supplies sectors.

Hidden dangers around the sheds

by Massimo Colombaroli

Every autumn and early winter, we see a rise in working dog poisoning cases linked to rat bait, slug bait, and other common farm chemicals.

Recently, we treated a working dog who had a lucky escape after suspected slug bait ingestion. Her owner noticed she was shaking uncontrollably and rushed her into the clinic, suspecting she had accessed slug bait stored in the shed. She arrived with a dangerously high temperature and severe muscle tremors caused by metaldehyde (the toxic ingredient found in many slug pellets).

The dog required intensive treatment, including repeated doses of muscle relaxants, active cooling, intravenous fluids, and overnight monitoring. Thankfully, quick action from her owner and prompt veterinary care meant she made a good recovery.

Metaldehyde poisoning can progress rapidly and lead to organ failure and death without treatment. There is no antidote, so treatment focuses on



controlling symptoms and supporting the dog until the toxin passes through the system.

While we have to keep our farms functioning, be careful with how and where you store these other toxins too:

- Rat bait - dogs find these baits very tasty, but poisoning can also occur after eating affected rodents.
- Anti-freeze - open bottles or even spills are enough to cause harm.
- Medication - especially accidental access or over-dosage of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory products.
- Insecticides, herbicides, fertilisers, solvents and garden pesticides.

If you suspect your dog has eaten any toxin, contact your vet immediately – don't wait for symptoms to appear. Quick treatment can make all the difference.

ON-FARM FOCUS



DAIRY



- Finish drying off and heifer teat sealing.
- Check on BCS of cows, especially in the first two weeks after dry-off.
- Keep an eye out for sick cows on crop.
- Plan Rotavirus and Crypto vaccination for your herd, finishing at least three weeks pre-calving.
- Book your KeyVet consult to review last season and plan for next season.
- Look out for our Winter Workshops, coming soon!

BEEF



- Treat for lice, if required.
- Mineral check stock going to works.
- Copper/Multimin injection for all adult stock.
- Drench youngstock and supplement with trace elements as needed.

SHEEP



- Treat for lice straight off shears, where possible.
- Body condition score ewes coming past the yards.
- Hoggets may benefit from sunshine vitamins (ADE).

DEER



- Pregnancy scan hinds.
- Mineral check stock going to works.
- Copper/Multimin injection for hinds and weaners.
- Drench weaners as necessary.

WORKING DOGS



- Consider a coat for your dogs to see them through the colder nights (especially your older or lighter ones).



Once vet Jannie had presented the data, everyone also enjoyed an interactive farmer's panel discussion hosted by vet Briar. "We know how much you value hearing what your peers are doing and getting the opportunity to ask fellow local farmers questions," Laura said.

Kerryn, our East Hub Manager, was also stoked with the events in both Gore and Balclutha, where the data was presented by Gore's senior vet Claire and Balclutha's senior vet Dan.

"These nights are such a great way for clients to connect with our teams – from catching up with the vets and techs who get the work done on your farm, to putting faces to the names of our farm services ladies and meeting support staff who are normally tucked away behind the scenes," Kerryn said.

If you'd like to delve further into your farm's reproductive performance, get in touch with your KeyVet who will be able to help you review your recent numbers and find areas that could be focused on for improvement next season.

Repro results round-up

by Georgia Lammie

We had an amazing time celebrating the end of the season with over 350 of our dairy farmers at our Repro Round-Up dinners in Gore, Balclutha and Winton last month.

The highlight of these events was sharing the strong reproductive results achieved by our farms this season.

The average 3-week in-calf rate across all VetSouth farms was 50%, against an industry target of 53% (which is what the best herds in New Zealand

are expected to achieve). The average 6-week in-calf rate across our farms was 71% (the industry target is 78%), with some individual farms achieving an outstanding rate of over 80%!

Breaking it down further, our West farms averaged 49% for 3-week in-calf rates and 71% for 6-week in-calf rates, East farms averaged 51% and 72.4% respectively, while South Otago farms achieved a fantastic 51.2% and 73.4%. Excitingly, these averages were improvements on the previous season – some by as much as 4%.

Congratulations to everyone for the great repro results, reflecting the hard work that you've put in throughout the whole season. We enjoyed hosting you all for a night off-farm to celebrate at our Repro Round-Up evenings.

Our West Hub Manager, Laura, summed up the Winton event: "It was wonderful to get our clients together and commend their repro results, with some who saw top results walking away with fabulous prizes."

The case of a locked leg

by Ben Bottcher

I was recently on-farm for a routine visit, when the farmer mentioned that he had an odd lame cow that hadn't yet responded to any treatment.

When we looked at her, she was dramatically lame, with a back leg that swung to the side wildly as she walked. The lameness seemed so serious, it nearly caused the farmer to euthanise her rather than getting a veterinary exam – but luckily I was already coming out to the farm for another job.

On physical examination, I found that the kneecap was locked over the medial trochlear ridge of the femur and held in place by the medial patellar ligament. This was causing the leg to be locked into rigid extension.

Fortunately for this cow (and a relief for the farmer), there is a relatively straightforward surgery to relieve this situation, called a medial patellar desmotomy.

After sterilising the area and applying local anesthetic, I used a scalpel to cut a small incision through the skin to access the stifle joint. The offending medial patellar ligament was located and snipped with the scalpel.

With just these two small cuts, the cow walked away like nothing had ever been wrong!

Although this condition is somewhat common in Brahman breeds of cattle, it is quite rare to come across in this part of the world, making it an interesting and satisfying case to see and fix.



Before dry-off, our West vets and vet techs had cowshed training sessions with our senior dairy vet Sunni, to polish up their teat seal insertion skills and practice the strict teat cleaning process we follow. Here's a group getting the Sunni stamp of approval!

It's been all hands on deck to help our dairy farmers get thousands of cows across Southland and South Otago dried off. We hope your dry-off goes well and wish you a good winter period – hopefully you can get some time away from the farm to recharge your batteries ahead of next season.





Pre-lambing management strategies

by Emma Lawson

With lambing sneaking up on us, now is the time to put things in motion to make it as successful as possible.

Lots of you will be scanning soon, which is an ideal time to check on your ewes' condition and trace element status. Some of the main opportunities at scanning include:

Multiples and nutrition

Identifying multiples is ideal for adjusting feed in late gestation. The metabolisable energy requirements (in MJ ME/ewe/day) for ewes increase in

the last 6 weeks before lambing, as 70% of foetal growth occurs during this period; as well as udder development and colostrum production.

If you have a deficiency of feed looming and you make plans for it now, you will have more options, such as [ordering supplementary feed](#), [finding grazing for hoggets](#), or [sourcing more good quality baleage](#).

Body condition scoring

This is a simple, quick, and low-cost tool that can be used for the management of ewes during gestation. Achieving body condition score (BCS) 3-3.5 at the end of gestation has a significant impact on lamb survival, birth weights, colostrum production, and ewe energy levels.

Identifying ewes with a lower BCS at scanning allows for quick intervention. [You only have 2-3 weeks after scanning to improve condition of ewes with BCS less than 3. These ewes need to be drafted off and preferentially fed.](#)

Talk to your vet about doing a faecal egg count (FEC) and if using a drench on these animals is necessary.

Selenium testing

Low selenium levels in stock can be a

cause of lamb losses. A deficiency can also make the flock more susceptible to infections, such as salmonella, campylobacter, toxoplasmosis, listeria, and pinkeye; even when they are fully vaccinated.

Selenium testing requires a blood sample to be taken from five ewes from the flock. As these samples only take 4-5 days to get back from the lab, [your vet can take these a week before scanning, so your ewes can be supplemented at scanning if necessary.](#)

Iodine supplementation

Lambs are susceptible to goitre; an enlargement of the thyroid gland caused by iodine deficiency in pregnant ewes. It is most common in newborn lambs whose ewes graze iodine-deficient soils or goitrogenic crops (like brassicas) in late pregnancy.

Supplementing ewes with long-acting iodine at scanning can reduce the risk of goitre in lambs. [It needs to be administered at least 8 weeks before lambing to have an effect.](#)

Give your KeyVet, or the farm services team in-clinic, a call if you need a hand with BCS, are keen to get some samples taken from your ewes, or need to order some pre-lamb supplies.

Are summer crops reducing worm burdens?



by Donna Hamilton

We've seen plenty of lamb fattening crops planted across Southland this season, often driven by the need for 'cleaner' feed with lower parasite contamination, increased feed value and a desire for better lamb yields. For some farms, they've also been used to help lift ewe performance.

Below are three sets of 10 individual faecal egg count (FEC) results. They are from lambs that have been grazing crop (kale and clover) or permanent pasture. These samples were taken 27-30 days after their previous drench.

KALE	CLOVER	PERMANENT PASTURE
0	9	260
252	40	449
31	62	282
66	70	2196
88	22	1874
108	13	1258
9	44	4268
31	0	832
4	0	418
22	0	937

You can see [the lambs grazing kale or clover crops picked up very little parasite burden](#) over the month, compared to the lambs on grass.

Of course, results will vary between farms and there is no guarantee that you would see the same results. A lot depends on how much grass is present in the crop paddock and the management around transitioning lambs onto crop. [For lambs on pasture, parasite contamination levels, grazing residuals, growth rates, and genetic susceptibility to worms all play a part.](#)

The level of grass contamination in these pasture-grazed lambs is significant and raises questions about future grazing management. Could this paddock instead be used for adult stock or cattle to help break the parasite cycle? It's also important to remember although these samples were taken in February, these parasite larvae will still pose a risk to weaned lambs later in the season.

As you start thinking about next season, it's worth considering whether

summer crops might fit into your system. Alternatively, does it make more sense to sell lambs earlier or at lighter weights to avoid carrying large numbers of lambs on pasture through autumn?

We would love to sit down with you to review your lamb season and see where there are opportunities to reduce parasite pressure on your farm.





All bark, sore bite!

by Jill Smyth

Dental disease can quietly build up in the background and seriously affect the comfort and performance of working dogs. These hard-working animals will often appear 'normal' despite having advanced disease processes.

Working dogs are at risk of damage to the teeth, whether it be from working with livestock, vehicle accidents, or just

wear and tear from gnawing bones and other chewing behaviours.

Some of the most common injuries we see are excessive wear of the teeth from chewing, and 'slab fractures', where part of a large part of the back tooth breaks away.

A tooth root abscess can form when the sensitive tissue inside a tooth is exposed and becomes contaminated with bacteria. From here, the bacteria can spread into the soft tissue surrounding the tooth socket, the jawbone and the bloodstream.

Once in the bloodstream, bacteria can travel all over the body, creating infection/abscesses/disease, e.g. organ damage, endocarditis (heart valves), septic arthritis (joint surfaces), and urinary tract infections (prostate and bladder).

Common signs of dental disease include weight loss, bad breath, chewing on one side of the mouth, dropping food when eating, rubbing at their face, or showing reluctance to eat hard food.

A conscious dental assessment with a veterinary nurse or veterinarian will give an indication of the level of dental disease your dog may be suffering.

The full extent of the problem will not be known until a comprehensive examination has been completed under general anaesthetic.

During this procedure, each tooth is assessed individually and radiographs taken if there is any cause for concern. Appropriate treatment can then be implemented to correct the problem or disease.

To avoid dental disease in your working dogs, avoid feeding very hard cannon bones, regularly check your dog's mouth – especially the back teeth – and talk to your vet if something doesn't seem right.

A 2020 New Zealand working farm dog study showed 35% of all dogs examined had oral cavity issues, with worn and broken teeth topping the list!

FREE DENTAL CONSULTS during June*

Not too sure what's going on inside your dog's mouth? Get us to have a look for you.


This month, you can bring your dog (or team of dogs) into clinic for a FREE dental consult* with one of our vet nurses. Ring your local VetSouth clinic now to book!

**T&Cs apply. Bookings required, limited appointments available. Offer only available until 30/06/2026 for working dogs, pet dogs and pet cats. One free consult per animal. Animals must be brought into clinic.*



Clinic corner

Proud in pink

Some of our crews donned pink tops and accessories in support of Pink Shirt Day last month to show we stand together against bullying. We love the positive message of kindness, inclusion and respect that this day promotes, and we strive to always live these values within our teams and in our relationships with you and your staff. 



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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