

## Rural round-up



**Ben Bottcher**  
Mixed Animal Vet  
(East)

It feels like winter has only just arrived, but before we know it, the days will stretch out and calves will start hitting the ground. With those busy days ahead, some proactive preparation now can set you up for a good calving season.

One of the simplest things to think about is where your cows will be calving. If possible, keep them within easy reach of yards and a head bail. Most calvings go smoothly, but when they don't, having cows close by for treatment makes life much easier for you and them!

Colostrum is another key thing to get right. Calves only get one chance to absorb the antibodies they need from colostrum, so timing is critical. If a calf is slow to get up and suckle, don't wait too long before stepping in with a bottle or tube feeder. Fresh colostrum is ideal, but frozen or powdered colostrum is still far better than ordinary milk.

Aim to give them 4-6 litres of high quality colostrum in their first 12 hours of life. A Brix refractometer is a handy tool for checking colostrum quality (readings above 22% are best).

For dairy cows in particular, the weeks leading up to calving are also a critical time for mineral balance. Calcium demands increase dramatically around calving and feeding a transition diet that is high in magnesium and low in potassium can help reduce the risk of milk fever, down cows and retained membranes.

Any questions, your KeyVet is always here to help. All the best for a smooth and successful calving time!

## Hill country tech

by Rachael Buckingham

**A focus on continuous improvement and efficiency is driving local sheep and beef farmers Nick and Alexis Wadworth to embrace technology on their Hokonui Hills farm.**

The couple run 8000 stock units across 2000ha (600ha effective) and have gradually introduced tools including a drone, Halter virtual fencing collars, on-farm weather monitoring, the Resolution farm records app, wifi-enabled possum traps and satellite coverage at their sheds.

They first purchased a drone in 2018 to help with lambing. Their current model, equipped with a zoom camera, allows them to check around 1000 ewes in just 30 minutes.

*"It's a massive time saver," says Nick. "It's really handy before a storm to see if anything needs assistance and afterwards to assess any damage. Going around paddocks on a bike can disturb stock and cause more harm than good."*

The drone has also reduced the workload for his heading dogs at lambing time, as well as saving fuel and bike maintenance costs.



This spring will be their first season using Halter virtual fencing collars on their Hereford breeding cows. While primarily used to help improve grazing management on rough blocks in the winter, Nick hopes the technology will also help identify any animal health issues sooner, by seeing the cows' location and getting alerts based on their movement.

*"Tech is definitely a key part of our farming system now. It helps ease the load, physically and mentally, and we're still managing to get everything done with a couple of sprogs on the ground, so that's a win!"*

Scan to read more about how they're using tech on-farm.



## ON-FARM FOCUS



### DAIRY



- Keep an eye out for sick cows on crop.
- Schedule your pre-calving PP+ trace element tests for cows.
- BCS herd.
- Prep your cows to calve and return to milk, beginning their feed transition three weeks before calving.
- Complete Rotavirus and Crypto vaccination of herd.
- Consider a Complete Calf Care plan to cover drenches, vaccines and more.
- Get your calving supplies sorted with our Spring Order Deals!

### BEEF



- Copper and selenium levels drop in cattle on crop – are yours ok? Book us to do some trace element tests.

### SHEEP



- Scan and BCS, pull out any lights.
- Ensure selenium levels have been checked within the last 12 months.
- Order clostridial vaccinations for pre-lamb ewes, plus hoggets.
- Talk with your vet about pre-lamb parasite management.

### DEER



- Copper is essential – is there enough on board for your stock?

### WORKING DOGS



- Consider a coat for your dogs to see them through the colder nights (especially your older or lighter ones).
- Sign up for our Dog Run to get their annual vaccinations!

# From data to decisions

by Elena Knupfer, CowSmart

Wearable technology generates a huge amount of information on modern dairy farms, but turning that data into practical management decisions can be challenging.

During the 2025-26 season, one of VetSouth's Southland dairy farms used data derived from their wearables and the CowSmart service to monitor transition performance, cow recovery, and reproductive outcomes.

Regular reviews of rumination, activity, and heat data enabled farmer and vet to work together to assess cow nutrition, evaluate transition performance, plan for mating, and monitor overall herd performance.

A key focus for the farm was rumination recovery following calving. Trends in rumination data across recently calved cows provide valuable insight into how effectively cows are adapting to early lactation.

By monitoring these trends, the CowSmart team were able to assess recovery patterns, identify opportunities for improvement, and recommend nutritional adjustments during the calving period.

As shown in the graphs below, noticeable improvements in rumination recovery were observed within a week of the farmer implementing the nutritional changes.

While recovery still remained below the desired target range in some groups, the trends provided both the farmer and his KeyVet with confidence that the management changes were having a positive impact and supported further refinement of transition management.

*"The CowSmart service gave us the ability to make changes to cow feeding during calving as we went, based on solid data, and then see the results quickly to determine whether it worked or not," said the farmer.*

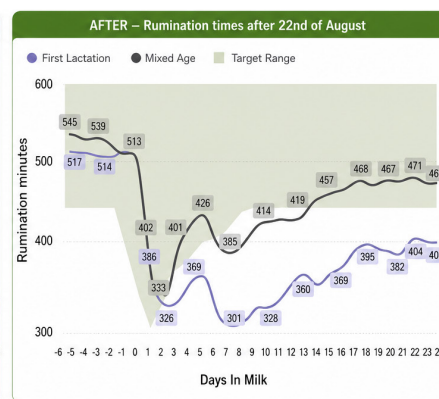
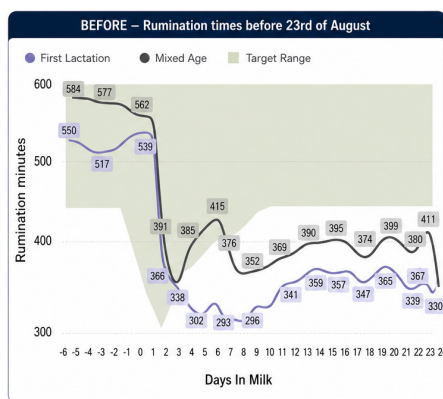
He subsequently achieved his farm's best empty rate to date alongside high production for the season.

While many factors contribute to reproductive performance, the ability to monitor transition recovery and evaluate management changes in real time provided valuable insight.

With wearable technology becoming increasingly common on NZ dairy farms, combining on-farm knowledge with CowSmart's interpretation of data can - as this farmer found - help identify opportunities earlier, evaluate the effectiveness of management changes, and support better-informed decisions during critical periods.

*"The CowSmart reports were the key to utilising our cow collars fully. All the data is there, but it isn't easily analysed. CowSmart does it for you."*

If you'd like to learn more about CowSmart or the data your wearables are collecting, talk to your KeyVet.



Transition summary graphs showing average rumination minutes for recently calved first-lactation and mixed-age cows before and after nutritional changes introduced on 23 August 2025.

## Trace elements ahead of calving



by Taren Jones

While most dairy farmers have a trace element supplementation routine, as we reset for another season it's worth asking: are you supplementing the right trace elements at the right time?

Trace element deficiencies can affect fertility, immunity, milk production, and overall performance and wellbeing. However, without testing, supplementation is a guessing game. Some herds may be being silently impacted by deficiencies, while others could be receiving minerals they don't need (draining your wallet for no benefit).

By taking samples from a small selection of your herd to test selenium and magnesium levels in the blood and copper stores in the liver, we can accurately determine your herd's

current trace element status. This enables you to target supplementation with the right minerals, reducing the risk of production losses and other bad outcomes from deficiencies. And, if you treat only what you need to, you'll avoid unnecessary product costs.

Our PP+ programme is designed to make this proactive approach both practical and cost-effective. If you're on the programme, you get testing at three key times of the season (pre-calving, pre-mating and pre-drying off) to monitor trace element levels. From this, we can make supplementation recommendations based on your herd's actual requirements at that time, rather than assumptions.

Give us a call if you'd like to sign up for PP+ and get some pre-calving tests done - it will save you in the long run!

## Give your calves a great start

Have you heard of our Complete Calf Care programme? It's our way of making life a little easier for you, with minerals, vaccines, drenches, and trace elements for your calves over their first 12 months.

We put together an Animal Health Calendar with you and provide reminders of treatment timing via text or email. Products can be delivered to your farm when needed, for no extra cost. Get a tailored plan in place with us now.

Scan to see our tips for raising healthy calves.



# Learning from lamb losses – the value of post-mortems

by Angela Butcher

Lamb loss remains one of the biggest areas of wastage in the NZ sheep industry, with up to 25% of lambs lost between scanning and shortly after birth.

Often, this is put down to the storm that inevitably comes through in the middle of lambing every year, but are there other areas where we have some more control over this wastage?

By performing simple post-mortems on 10-20 lambs – collected across the lambing period (and stored appropriately) – that were either born dead or died soon after birth, you might find there are some levers you can pull to reduce this.

In many cases, lamb deaths are multifactorial, but understanding the main drivers enables farmers and vets to put plans in place to reduce losses in future seasons.



**In just 10-15 minutes, a lamb post-mortem can often determine whether death occurred before, during, or after birth, and whether it was from birthing difficulties, starvation and exposure complex, infection, congenital abnormalities, or trauma.**

We look at a few key areas to give us these answers:

- Birth weight
- Swelling under the skin and/or around the navel
- The size of the thyroid glands vs. the rest of the body
- The umbilical vessels
- The lungs, heart, stomach, liver, kidneys and intestines
- Any fluid present in the body cavities.

Looking at all of the above will give us clues as to what factors caused the death of the lamb being examined.

Once these are identified, we can dig into wider contributing factors, such as ewe nutrition, 'litter' size, trace element status, shearing time, and infectious disease challenges within the flock.

**While post-mortems may not prevent further losses for the current season, they can provide valuable information to help improve survival rates next season.**

This is a big topic to unpack, so if you'd like to learn more about investigating lamb losses on your farm, have a yarn with your KeyVet.

## Something new for navels



by Donna Hamilton

Protecting newborn stock from infection when bringing them into the sheds over calving and lambing is vital. Traditionally, we've all reached for the iodine spray as a first line of defence.

Last year, our client Sharon Paterson, of Waikaka Station, tried a new product on navels – Umbirez – in their lambing shed and was impressed with the results.

*"I thought it was great," she said. "It gave me more confidence that the navel was drying out faster and getting sealed off quickly. It was also very easy to use, with no blockages in the pump during the season."*

Umbirez is a spray-on product that was developed in the UK for navel protection of lambs and calves.

It's a bioresin that is combined with minerals, so that it sticks to the site, providing protection against bacteria. Ethanol also aids in drying the navel.

The spray is bluish in colour, so you can see who has been treated, and one treatment is generally all that is needed. A 500ml bottle will treat approximately 100 animals.

Umbirez will be available in all of our clinics' farm stores this spring.



## Are you ready for rearing?

Lambing is always hectic and once the season starts, you won't have the time to keep dashing out for essentials. If you are going to be rearing lambs this year, it pays to have your shed and supplies well prepared ahead of time!

For animal health supplies, keep an eye out for our Lambing Spring Order Deals, coming 31 July - 9 August. Stock up and save! Details to follow.

As for other preparation, we've got a comprehensive guide that covers how to set up the shed, food and water requirements, and all the animal health supplies you'll need to raise great lambs.

Scan to go to the lamb rearing guide.



# Ionophore toxicity risks for dogs

by Hugh Hasselman

With calf and lamb rearing on the horizon, it's especially important to be mindful of any livestock feeds containing coccidiostats, which can pose significant health risks when inadvertently consumed by companion animals such as dogs, cats and horses.

Ionophore coccidiostats are a class of compounds commonly used in livestock feeds, particularly calf rearing meals, to improve growth rates and prevent certain diseases such as coccidiosis.

Dogs are particularly susceptible to ionophore toxicity because their bodies lack the special digestive systems and metabolic pathways that help ruminants break down and detoxify these compounds.

As a result, **even small amounts of ionophores can cause severe, and sometimes fatal, health effects in dogs**, including muscle and heart damage, neurological symptoms, and respiratory distress.

Symptoms of ionophore toxicity in dogs:

- Acute vomiting and loss of appetite, often within hours of exposure.
- Musculoskeletal weakness, lethargy, and difficulty walking.
- Muscle tremors and twitching, progressing to ataxia (unsteadiness), stiffness or paresis (partial paralysis).
- Rapid or irregular heart rate, which may cause collapse.
- Respiratory distress, including panting and difficulty breathing.
- In severe cases, sudden death due to heart or respiratory failure.

**If ionophore toxicity is suspected in a dog, immediate veterinary attention is critical.**

Treatment protocols usually begin with decontamination, such as inducing vomiting or administering activated

charcoal. Supportive care may include intravenous fluids, muscle relaxants, medications to support heart function, and supplemental oxygen.

Clinical pathology diagnostic tests would be conducted on blood and urine looking for any enzyme and chemistry changes consistent with ionophore toxicity. Fluid therapy and symptomatic management are often necessary for several days.

The prognosis for a dog would depend on the amount ingested and how quickly treatment is initiated.

**Free range chickens are also at risk of ionophore toxicity** – take every precaution to prevent poultry from accessing livestock feeds or eating spilled feed intended for cattle or sheep. Plus, when hens consume feed containing these compounds, residues can accumulate in their eggs, presenting a food safety concern for humans who eat those eggs as well. Always only use feed that is clearly labelled as suitable for laying hens.



**SPRING ORDER DEALS 2026**

**CALVING: 3-26 JULY**

Save on supplies for spring. Shop at your local clinic or fill in an online order form, and be in to WIN a \$500 VetSouth voucher!\*

\*T&Cs apply.

Scan while deals are on to order online and get an extra entry to the prize draw

Lambing deals coming in August

## Clinic corner

### Lunch with rural ladies

We're proud to have supported the Beef + Lamb New Zealand Southern Ladies' Long Lunch once again, as they empowered and celebrated women in the rural sector. Those of our team who attended enjoyed the amazing line-up of speakers. Vet techs Megan and Anna and Farm Services administrator Heidi even got a snap with Hilary Barry.



### Dental care, alpaca style!

Not something our vets see every day; our South Otago team polished up a herd of alpaca's dental health. These fluffy critters have continuously growing teeth that can develop sharp points over time, affecting their ability to chew and maintain weight. After performing a dental examination on each animal to assess tooth wear and identify abnormalities, our vets addressed any issues they found. The old towel-over-the-eyes trick kept the patients calm!



## 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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