

## Rural round-up



**Kath Aplin**  
Large Animal Vet  
(West)

It's been 12 months since I started at VetSouth during the 'monsoon season' of spring 2024 – so it's great to experience a sunnier spring this year.

At the time of writing this, cows are looking good, grass is growing well, and we vets are less slammed with emergency work compared to this time last year. Although fingers crossed I haven't jinxed things by saying that...

After many years working with British farmers, it's a great learning experience spending time here in Southland. As I familiarise myself with how Southland farming systems work, I'm constantly reminded that there's always something new to learn, and that there are lots of different ways to approach things.

Compared with British farms, Southland farms tend to have more cows, managed by fewer staff. I also get the impression Kiwi farmers are more likely to prioritise getting time away from the farm than their British counterparts. To achieve these three things while still maintaining a productive and profitable herd requires efficient working and smart planning, which farmers here seem to be good at.

I enjoy working with farmers who focus their attention on getting the basics right and having clear goals. Across all different types of dairy farms those basic foundations are similar – cows are still cows, whatever system they're in – so there's always lots to be gained from sharing knowledge between farms and even across countries. Hopefully vets like me can help with that.

On a final note, if you do get time off-farm, I'd definitely recommend an overseas experience – at any stage in life!

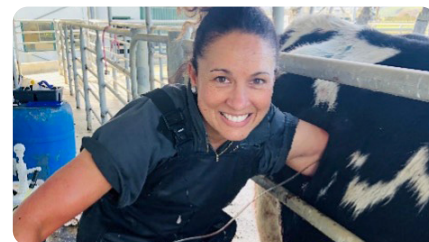
## Vetting in spring

by Sunita McGrath

**Spring is here... finally the dark days of winter, mountains of paperwork, and endless cups of tea during consults have come to an end.**

It's time for us vets to don our capes (or overalls), set cruise control in our trucks, and head to battle it out in the field – rain, hail or shine – calving cows and trying to fix whatever problems spring throws at us.

As someone who generally doesn't do well with chaos, springtime is the exception for me. It's a thrilling time when our skills and knowledge as vets gets put to the test. There are days when we have wins and days that we don't. It can be a roller coaster of emotion, alongside tiredness and soreness. Most days I forget to eat and just survive on my morning coffee, adrenaline, and the odd splash of rotten calf goop in my mouth... actually, maybe that's why I don't eat. The phone calls are never ending, but it's a good feeling being able to help someone with a problem – or several.



Each day is different, but we always give it our best to get a good outcome for your cow, calf, or herd. It goes without saying that the chances of good outcomes are always better earlier in the piece. Cows are great at hiding sickness; they're a prey animal, so they don't want to show they're unwell. It's amazing what they will tolerate while trying to make you think they're fine. Honing good stock skills will help you pick these animals up early and get them treated faster. Wearable cow tech is also changing the way sickness can be swiftly detected.

We know you've got a lot going on during spring. Always remember: your KeyVet is just a phone call or text message away. We're here to help you and your animals, whether it's just one cow or a whole-herd problem. By getting us involved early, you're doing yourself and your stock a favour – and you're doing us a favour too, as we love doing what we do!

## ON-FARM FOCUS



### DAIRY



- Maintain good calf rearing processes – particularly around colostrum management and pen hygiene.
- Schedule your disbudding, metrichecking and pre-mating PP+ trace element tests.
- BCS cows ahead of repro (aim for a 4.5 average).
- Prep your pre-mating heat detection – what aids/systems are you using?
- BVD test/vaccinate and fertility test bulls at least eight weeks before mating.
- BVD vaccinate heifers.

### BEEF



- Keep roughage in the diet of your cows right through calving to support magnesium metabolism.
- BVD vaccinations and clostridial booster shots for bulls and heifers.

### SHEEP



- It could be worth getting post-mortems of stillborn lambs to identify the cause of death. This includes a test for their iodine level. Sampling 30 lambs would be a good start to understand what's happening on your farm.
- Consider anti-inflammatories (as well as antibiotics) for bearing treatment.
- Order tailing supplies early to benefit from our special pricing on scabby mouth and clostridial vaccines.

### DEER



- Sort stags into velveting mobs and priority feed for velvet growth.

### WORKING DOGS



- Feed a high-protein, high-fat diet to support endurance and recovery.

# Dirty business – strategies for calf scours

by Emma Middlemass

Just like that we are well into calving and calf rearing for this season! And where there's calves, there's the possibility of calf scours.

When you notice a calf with scours, alongside their diarrhoea you may also see other signs of sickness, such as:

- Not drinking/feeding well
- Isolating themselves from the group
- Lethargy, including not getting up from lying down
- Sunken or dull eyes
- Drooping ears
- Gunky nose or eyes
- Skin tent (dehydrated)
- A high temperature.

There are lots of different causes of scours – and you can't tell which one you are dealing with from the appearance of the poo!

The types include:

- Nutritional (caused by colostrum/milk quality, under or over-feeding, etc.)
- Viral (caused by Rotavirus, Coronavirus, etc)

- Bacterial (caused by Salmonella, E. Coli, Campylobacter, etc.)
- Parasitic (caused by Coccidia, Cryptosporidium, etc)

It's best to test to find out what you're dealing with, so you can treat and manage the case effectively – without wasting expensive products that might not work.

**We have a quick, on-farm scours test available which uses a faecal sample to help determine the likely cause** (or at the very least, rule out some of the common viral and bacterial causes). These tests work in tandem with discussion with your vet, who will also look at the physical symptoms of the calf/calves and your management practices, to make a diagnosis and appropriate treatment plan.

**However, the thing that's most likely to kill your scouring calf is dehydration.**

Calves with diarrhoea lose a lot of fluid and electrolytes, which causes them to go downhill quickly, and can lead to death if not corrected in time.

**We recommend giving them 2L of electrolytes in the morning, followed by 2L of milk at midday, and another 2L of electrolytes in the afternoon.**

The milk in between ensures they're still getting the energy they need, while the electrolytes rehydrate them. Allow at least two hours between feeds of electrolytes and milk.

Be aware that many of the diseases that cause calf scours are zoonotic - which means the disease can transfer to humans. Hygiene around the calf shed, and especially sick calves, is paramount. No one wants to be treating calves with diarrhoea while they have diarrhoea themselves!



## Tech talk: Disbudding

by Zoe McCormick & Samantha Whyte

As light creeps back into the mornings and the frosty grip of winter gets weaker, it means it's time for spring jobs.

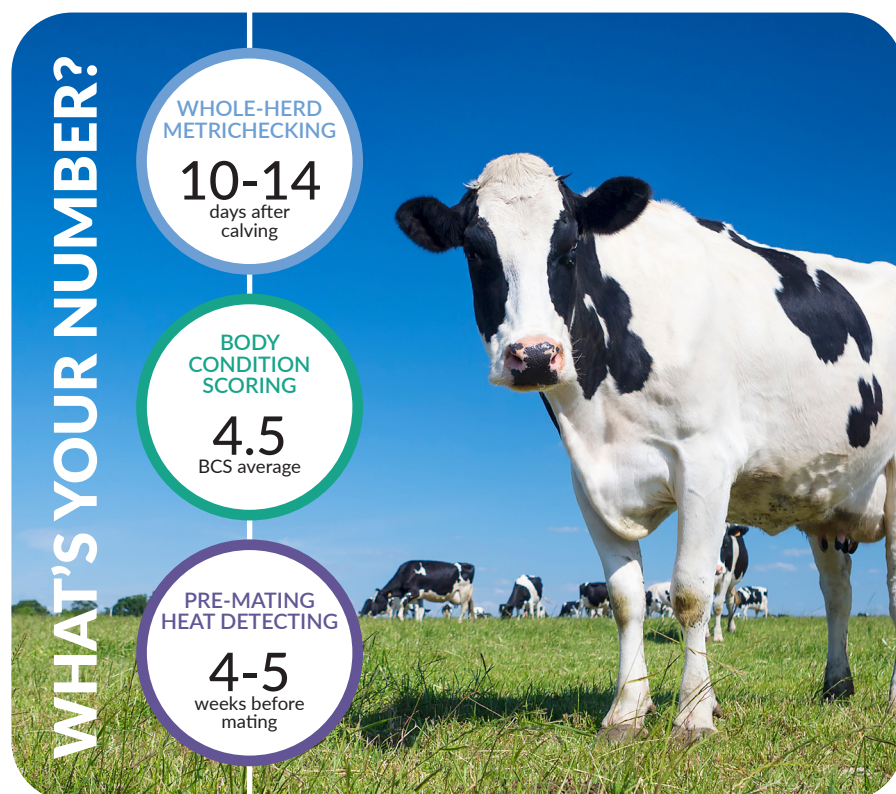
For us vet techs it's when our calendars are packed with lots of disbudding work, which is a favourite of ours. Days disbudding are filled with calves, banter, great teammates, and amazing farmers.

Disbudding involves **sedating and locally anaesthetising calves, before carefully and safely burning out their horn buds**. We'll often vaccinate sedated calves at the same time.

Removing the buds while they're between 2-6 weeks old means they won't grow sharp horns as an adult, helping prevent injuries to herdmates and handlers. **It's much easier on the animal getting them done young** and means you don't have to worry about it later down the track. We'll happily pop out to your farm a couple of times as different groups of calves reach the right age.

Disbudding calves can be very physically demanding on techs' bodies, so it's important for us to stay hydrated, eat well and rest when we can.

We can't wait to catch up with you all out on farm during this crazy time of year!





# Vitamin B12 testing

by Donna Hamilton

Earlier this year, our vets in the Clutha area tested liver vitamin B12 levels in lambs, prompted by farmers' concerns about poor growth rates.

**On all farms tested, at least some lambs had liver B12 levels in the deficiency range.** On a couple of farms, all lambs tested were low.

To dig deeper, we requested results from the lab for the whole of the Southland and the Clutha regions. They reported 103 sets of tests (likely to be from 103 different farms) and 52% of these test sets showed one or more animals as deficient. Additionally, 74% had at least one animal in the marginal range.

This indicates there is a huge opportunity in the South for increased production by getting this corrected.

**Vitamin B12 is essential for growth in young stock, and our area is one of the most deficient places in New Zealand.** Lambs are at the greatest risk of deficiency, followed by mature sheep and calves aged 6-18 months. B12 plays a key role in converting food into energy, which is why deficiencies often result in poor growth rates.

We are now recommending increased testing to see if your farm has any B12 issues.



**There are a range of testing options available:**

**Live liver samples** – Liver samples are the best option for testing and allow us to assess the animal's reserves. These can be taken from live lambs from December onwards.

**Works liver samples** – We can provide you with a form to send along with lambs going to the works, so liver samples can be collected there.

**Dead lamb liver samples** – You can also take a small liver sample from deceased lambs. Simply place the sample in a zip lock bag and store it in a freezer. Once you have four samples collected, we can send them to the lab for you.

**Blood tests** – These show more about what the diet contains. However, blood tests can also show artificially raised levels when animals have been yarded or are under stress.

Among our clients, supplementation programmes vary widely – from no supplementation at all, to prill applications, to both short and long-acting B12 products. Keep an eye out for a future Paddock Press article where we'll explore the pros and cons of each option.

In the meantime, we recommend chatting with your KeyVet about the best time to test your stock this season.

Why did the sheep call the police?



She was fleeced.



## Larval cultures give more insight



by Donna Hamilton

Most of our farmers are familiar with bringing in 10 individual faecal samples for a FEC (faecal egg count). Many are now discovering even more by having a larval culture done.

A FEC identifies the number of eggs present from a specific group of parasites (Strongyles). **But a larval culture goes further by showing the proportion of these additional species present:**

- Ostertagia (Teladorsagia)
- Trichostrongylus (Trichs)
- Cooperia
- Haemonchus
- And more.

When assessing whether your drenching programme has been effective, this information provides valuable insight and can assist with decision making around drench products and methods going forward.

An important difference to remember with these two tests is while FEC samples should be refrigerated immediately to stop hatching, **larval culture samples MUST NOT be refrigerated**, as this kills the eggs and prevents hatching.

**Larval culture results take about two weeks.** However, excitingly, a faster test is in development. Hopefully we'll have this available for the coming season – watch this space.

## Top tips for lambs

- ✓ **Add a multi-clostridial vaccine** to your tailing plan to prevent any sudden deaths. Bacteria can enter the wound around the tail after docking, leading to tetanus.
- ✓ **Vaccinate for scabby mouth** – infection rate can be as high as 90% in sheep mobs! Talk to your vet about the best live vaccine option for your farm and ask about our early-bird specials.
- ✓ **Boost young stock with B12** as this vitamin will maximise their growth throughout the season. Have a chat with your vet to discuss options.





## Upskilling local dairy farmers

Every winter, when our dairy farmers have a little more time up their sleeve, we run our popular Winter Workshop Series. These workshops aim to help farm workers learn more about common spring topics and feel prepared for the season ahead.



With sessions in both Winton and Gore this June/July, our vets shared their expertise on spring first aid and assisting a cow to calve, milking management and mastitis, preventing and treating lameness, and calf rearing. New this year, we also offered workshops looking at understanding your wearable cow tech pre-calving and ways to reduce Johnes' disease on your farm.

The vets who took these sessions included some great interactive elements to keep things interesting. Attendees also came along with some great questions that kept discussion flowing.

A big thank you to all those who attended – hopefully the knowledge you gained will come in useful over the coming months, even if it's just one little tip or trick that stuck in your mind.

## Clinic corner



### Celebrating lambing Spring Order

It was lovely to see those of you who came into clinic during our Lambing Spring Order events in Gore, Tapanui and Invercargill in August.

Hopefully you took advantage of our deals on the things you need for lambing by placing product orders – and we hope you enjoyed the free food filling up your belly too.

It was particularly awesome to have some of our sheep vets from Winton visit the Invercargill clinic during their event to answer all your burning sheep-related questions.

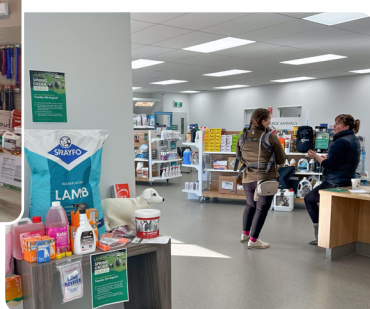
### Yarning with sheep farmers

Last month we held three Local Vet Yarns for sheep farmers, one in Owaka, one in Drummond, and one in Heriot. These were a great opportunity for farmers to connect with vets and neighbours, and chat about the season ahead. Thank you to everyone who made it off-farm to come along!



We ran an on-the-job photo competition amongst our staff and this was the winning entry!

Vets Fleur, Emma and Taren were all smiles posing beside the six-month old heifer they had just finished performing a hernia surgery on.



## 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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