

Rural round-up



Katie Robinson
Client Relationship
Coordinator (East)

Well, spring seems to have definitely sprung with a hiss and a roar!

At the time of writing this, the weather has been relatively kind to us so far, with just the odd reminder we are in Southland and Otago where nature can have some questionable mood swings.

Calving is now in high gear, and we've heard of some outstanding numbers of calves dropping on the same day. Before we know it, the tables will turn and there will be lots of little lambs bouncing around.

In my role as a Client Relationship Coordinator (CRC) here in Tapanui, I'm fortunate to hear from our local farmers every day, particularly when they need animal health products organised and delivered straight to the farm. I love being able to help them get what they need quickly and easily, so they can get on with the day without having to make an extra trip into town. At this time of year especially, when every minute on-farm is valuable, it's great to be able to make things that little bit easier.

It's certainly a busy time of year for CRCs, but I do enjoy the excitement and energy of it all! At the moment, we're jumping between pre- and post-calving and lambing products for cows and ewes, as well as products for newborn calves and lambs. Every farm is different, and by the start of September, farmers can be at quite different stages of the season. Wherever you're at in your spring plan, we're here to help you get what you need.

I wish you all the best for a smooth and successful calving and lambing, and I hope the market holds well.

Minerals backed by evidence-based advice

by Hazel Willis, Heartland Feeds

Achieving optimal performance and health from your stock requires more than simply giving some minerals. Understanding what nutrients your animals need, how they should be delivered to be effective, and how they fit within your wider feeding programme is critical.

Heartland Feeds is proud to partner with VetSouth, giving southern farmers access to feeds and minerals that meet their farm's specific systems and nutritional needs, backed up by on-farm consulting and veterinary guidance.

Whether you're a dairy, sheep, or beef farmer, our expert team wants to hear about your goals and work with you to achieve them.

After assessing your current feeding programme, Heartland Feeds can interpret your pasture and feed analyses to identify any potential mineral deficiencies, and develop supplementation plans tailored to your individual farm. This ensures your animals are receiving the right



balance of trace and macro minerals to support production, fertility, immunity, and overall health.

We have many options for tailored macro minerals. For dairy farmers feeding supplements such as PKE in-shed, loose mineral blends can be incorporated directly into the feeding programme. Otherwise, mineral pellets are one of the most effective ways to supply key minerals such as calcium, magnesium, sodium and phosphorus.

Where off-the-shelf trace mineral supplementation is suitable, Heartland Feeds has worked with VetSouth to develop a range of soluble mineral products that can be delivered through water dispensing systems. These mixes have been specifically created for the requirements of local conditions.

By combining veterinary expertise, nutrition consulting, feed analysis, and flexible product options, we help farmers develop practical mineral solutions that support your stock while reducing the risk of costly mineral deficiencies. Ask your KeyVet or local retail team about Heartland Feeds.

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 with us.
- BCS cows (ideal average is 4.5).
- Prep for heat detection – what aids/systems are you using?
- BVD test/vaccinate and fertility test bulls at least eight weeks pre-mating.
- BVD vaccinate heifers.

BEEF



- Keep roughage in your cows' diet right through calving to support magnesium metabolism.
- BVD tests/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 through us.

DEER



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

WORKING DOGS



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

Why humerus fractures are no laughing matter

by Brooke Barnes

We've recently seen many cases of humerus fractures on local farms, a nasty condition that impacts heifers going through their first lactation.

The fractures occur when bones become weakened by decreased bone mass and increased bone resorption. They are typically seen at two key times: in the seven days either side of calving, or during peak lactation. An estimated 4,500 heifers are affected in NZ each year, and outbreaks can affect up to 10% of a single farm's herd!

Copper deficiency was thought to be the main culprit, as affected animals were found to have low levels. However, recent studies have suggested that this is likely a symptom, rather than the cause. When bone collagen is depleted, copper is mobilised to help strengthen the bones, lowering stored levels.

So, what is actually causing the bone breakdown?

Calcium, phosphate and magnesium

Low calcium and high phosphorus diets have been proven to cause a reduction in bone mineral density.

The ideal dietary calcium to phosphate ratio (Ca:P) is around 1.5-2:1. In Southland, we have seen lots of farms switch from wintering on kale to wintering on fodder beet. Kale has a higher Ca:P ratio of around 3:1, whereas fodder beet is typically less than 1:1 and the bulb crop causes more soil ingestion (also phosphorus).

Calcium is vital as a heifer's demand for calcium increases dramatically when she reaches the end of her pregnancy and the start/peak of her lactation. Dietary calcium needs to be around 1% during this period. If calcium intake does not meet the demand of the body, then bone resorption will increase.

High magnesium levels can also have a negative effect, as magnesium competes to bind with calcium and blocks important enzymes needed for bone remodelling. Think about whether your farm differentiates between supplementing magnesium to heifers and to older cows, as providing too much magnesium to the younger stock could be having a detrimental effect.

Over the last few years, there has also been less clover in southern pastures (clover has three times more calcium than ryegrass does), more efficient magnesium supplementation through the use of dosatron, and a trend to select for higher-producing heifers.

These factors all impact the increase in the number of cases we are seeing.

So, what can you do to avoid this condition?

Reduce the risk to your heifers

- Give your heifers gold standard copper supplementation, and consider getting us to test their stored copper levels.
- Review your winter, springer and lactation diets for your heifers. Do they need a calcium boost?
- Check the types and quantities of magnesium your heifers are getting around high-risk periods.
- If possible, switch to kale instead of fodder beet for your heifers.

Spontaneous humeral fractures can be a big issue for some farms, which has a huge impact on both animal and farmer welfare. If you want to discuss what changes could be implemented into your specific farming system to reduce the risk, talk to your KeyVet.

Meet the vet herd: Ruby



by Georgia Lammie

If you're around the Clutha area, have you met our new large animal vet Ruby?

She joined our South Otago team at the start of the year from Australia. [With the launch of our new clinic in Milton in 2025, Ruby's here to help us expand our production animal support further into Otago.](#) Although based out of our Balclutha clinic, she travels to farms as far away as Mosgiel.

Ruby grew up in a town called Broome, in the north of Western Australia (croc and Brahman cattle country). She was a self-proclaimed 'weird horse girl' as a

kid, and a love of animals and people led her to focus on a career as a vet.

She trained as a veterinarian at Murdoch University in Perth. After graduating in 2023, Ruby worked as a mixed animal vet in Geraldton, a town a few hours away from Perth. It's known for great crayfishing and staggering 50-degree days in summer.

Now in her third year of practice, Ruby continues to love the variety that a career as a vet brings to her days – from the species you're treating, to the clients you get to chat to.

[She's excited to be in New Zealand and living and working in such a beautiful place.](#) She says driving around our stunning countryside to jobs often has her pinching herself in wonder of it.

She has been loving trying all the surfing and tramping spots around the region when she has time off.

Be sure to have a yarn with Ruby if you see her out on your farm this spring!



Dirty business

Calf scours

There are lots of different causes of scours in calves, so it's best to test to find out what you're dealing with. We have a quick, on-farm scours test available which uses a faecal sample to help determine the likely cause. These tests work in tandem with discussion with a vet, who will consider the physical symptoms of the animal/s and your management practices, to make a diagnosis and appropriate treatment plan.

Bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD)

Around 80% of NZ dairy and beef herds are exposed to BVD. Talk to your KeyVet about a management programme for your farm. As well as blood or ear notch testing, you can do a bulk milk test to give you an indication of your herd's exposure levels. Vaccinate bulls now and cows three weeks prior to mating to help prevent the spread of the disease.

The effects of ewe wastage

by Donna Hamilton

Ewe wastage is an important consideration to running a profitable sheep farm.

I recently had a look at a **study done on three large farms in the North Island, which showed 90% of hoggets left the flock from ewe wastage!** That is, only 10% make it through to be cast for age.

The study considered ewe wastage to be any ewe that left the flock (died, or culled) before the age of six. The ewes that were culled were mostly dry, had udder issues, or poor health etc.

A big impact of this wastage is that more replacements are required, creating a younger flock that will have a lower ovulation rate and, therefore, scan lower than mixed aged ewes and ultimately impact overall flock performance.

This is where replacement rate comes in – an annual measure of how many hoggets are required as replacements (an indicator of ewe wastage). So, what

is your replacement rate? What portion of your flock do you replace each year? Is this impacting your production? Are there ways to reduce your percentage required?

Here's some data from our farmers:



These figures have come from the stock numbers we collect during our annual consults and show that **the majority of our clients sit between a 25-30% replacement rate (RR).**

Having a lower RR will enable you to have more lambs for sale, the opportunity to put more ewes to a terminal ram, and less feed going to 'non-productive' stock.

The greatest predictor of ewe wastage is ewe body condition score (BCS) pre-tup. The better her BCS, the less likely she is to die, or be prematurely culled, before the next mating period.

If you would like to unpack this and work through improvements in your flock, get in touch with your KeyVet.



Thanks to everyone who came along to our winter sheep farmer events in Waikaka and Winton. We had a fantastic time catching up with clients and sharing some practical insights into parasite management from guest speakers, vets and local farmers.

Plan ahead for post-weaning growth

by Donna Hamilton

There are some things you can plan now that will benefit post-weaning growth rates for your lambs.

Ideally, lambs would be weaned onto pasture that has not had ewes lambing on it. These pastures will have lower parasite challenge, and that is a big factor in achieving good lamb growth rates. "Avoid the parasites" is what we are targeting.

Do you have dry hoggets on the farm? They could be preparing pastures for lambs in the pre-wean period, as could cattle or deer.

Areas where single ewes have been will likely have a lower parasite challenge than twin and triplet paddocks. For some, these may be suitable for weaned lambs.

Now is also the time for planning lamb fattening crops. Make sure you are asking the right questions of your agronomist so that you invest in a crop that will perform well in your location, within your farming system, and under your management.

Any steps you can take in this direction are worthwhile. Don't let perfect be the enemy of good – do what you can and invest a bit of time in pondering these options.

Saving lambs with dextrose



by Donna Hamilton

Lambs born to well-fed ewes with a body condition score of 3 or more will have good reserves of brown fat. This provides readily available energy to fuel a newborn lamb before it absorbs milk.

However, sometimes these energy reserves can run out before the lamb gets its first feed. Once this happens, the lamb becomes cold and weak, and its chances of survival drop quickly.

One way to buy a little more time is to provide the lamb with an energy source it can use immediately – an intra-abdominal dextrose injection.

IMPORTANT: give the energy before warming the lamb! This means there is energy available for the body to generate heat with. If you heat up the lamb first, this can quicken death.

A 20% solution of dextrose is needed. We can only get dextrose in 40% solutions, so you need to dilute it using a 50:50 mix with cooled boiled water.

You can do this in a small flask using warm water for best results. **A lamb needs 10ml per kg of liveweight (that's 30-50ml for most lambs).**

First, spray the site with iodine. Then, using a clean, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch, 18G needle and 50ml syringe, insert the needle just on the head side of the navel, directing it towards the chest. You may feel a wee pop, that's the needle going into the abdomen (as required).

Once properly in place, inject the solution. If you see any swelling, you are not in far enough, so reposition the needle. Now, warm your lamb up, and go from there.

Not mothering up? You can still use this technique in the paddock when lambs are born late in the day and a rough night is predicted. Doing this and leaving them for Mum to look after can be very worthwhile.





Left: The students getting a taste of the trip's namesake on the Swede Safari this winter.

Top: The group from the first Swede Safari.

Twenty years of Swede Safari

by Sara Berryman

Some 20 years ago, when I was a fresh-faced new-grad vet, Mark came to a few of us with the words: "I've got an idea you could help me with..."

There have been times I've regretted saying "yes" to a Mark Bryan idea. This definitely wasn't one of them.

The concept was two-fold. Wintering and farming stock in Southland is very different from what most vet students experience in the North Island. Meanwhile, Southland is a long way from New Zealand's only vet school, and expensive for students to get to – yet the region, and the South Island more broadly, needs vets.

So began a collaboration between VetSouth, Massey University and the Dairy Cattle Vets branch of the New Zealand Veterinary Association. The aim was to give a small group of fifth (final)-year vet students a glimpse into life, farming and veterinary work in the deep south.

With significant funding from all three parties, we were able to bring 16 students – plus a long-suffering Massey staff chaperone – down to Southland, in mini vans, for five days. And so, the 'Swede Safari' was born.

We were in for a ride, as the students made the most of their time away from lecture theatres, spending their days out on farms and their nights experiencing some good old southern hospitality (and a few questionably named RTDs) at the Middle Pub in Winton (thankfully, publicans Chubbs and Nancy were ok with the light nudity that followed said RTDs...).

Suffice to say, it was a success and we decided we would have to repeat the event every year!

Over the years, we have tried hard to combine some solid teaching with plenty of fun, whilst avoiding hospital trips, and it seems to have been a recipe for success.

The students leave with a much better appreciation of what Southland is all about and some of them even come back when they graduate, to indulge in more of what vetting in Southland has to offer.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the generous farmers who have opened their farms and shared their time and knowledge. **Students are always struck by how willing Southland farmers are to share what they know – and by the privilege of being welcomed onto their farms. It's an important glimpse into the reciprocal bond that can be fostered between a rural vet and farmer, and the value each brings to the other.**

Somehow, we're now 20 years down the track. The vet curriculum at Massey has changed, and Swede Safari has adapted with it. With vet class sizes more than doubling recently, it may need to evolve again, but we're working on ways to keep it going.

Here's hoping the Swede Safari is still bringing young vets south for another 20 years!

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 Winton, Balclutha, Gore and Tapanui in August.

We hope you grabbed some great deals, bagged a spot prize and a snack, and managed to have a yarn with our teams for any advice you needed. A big thank you to everyone who took advantage of our specials over our lambing Spring Order Deals week by placing product orders (in-clinic and online).



Our young vets recently got stuck into a calf fetotomy training session, practicing the practical skills and building the confidence to handle this challenging procedure. Learning techniques in a hands-on way and hearing tips for these types of cases from more experienced vets sets those new to our team up for success as they tackle calving season.

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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