

# The Vet Link



Newsletter to Clients of

Issue:

DEC 2016

The season has been a slow one, with many herds recording low submission rates early on. However, the rapidly improving payout forecast is welcome relief for all involved in the dairy industry. In this issue read about Facial Eczema control. Zinc is still king, but we can be a lot better at using it. Read articles on planning bull out date and Pregnancy testing. Martine tells us what is happening to the BVD levels in our herds. Heather tells of great success on several farms that have invested heavily into our heifer rearing programs. I was most interested in reading Ben's analysis of the BCS results for our clients. Three of the 36 farms reached target of 5 BCS for cows and 5.5 for 2 & 3 year olds! Only 0.4 BCS was gained on average over the dry period! This in a year with good Autumn growth. But everyone did milk on late into the season. It does prove to us that achieving the BCS goals is phenomenally difficult.

We have some strategies for this Autumn. In the meantime enjoy the festive season.  
Merry Christmas. Chris.

## PLANNING YOUR PREGNANCY TESTING

How much information you want determines the best time to pregnancy test.

### Identifying early calving cows:

If your mating period is very short (9-10 weeks), we can scan the herd once 6 weeks after the end of mating. From this we can, with the help of mating dates and electronic recording, ID early calvers, late calvers and empty cows. With our mobile recording device the accuracy and speed of early scanning has improved and the results are automatically uploaded to MINDA.

If you have a longer mating period you will need to scan twice. It's best to scan 12-14 weeks after the start of mating. This information is invaluable for knowing an actual 6 week in-calf rate, making late lactation BCS and strategic dry cow therapy/ internal teat sealant decisions based on dry period length.

Another scan 6-8 weeks after the end of mating will be necessary to identify empty cows.

### Identifying only lates and/or empties:

If you only want to identify lates and empties, one scan 6-8 weeks after the end of mating will allow us to identify the last 4-6 weeks of mating. If you only want to identify empties the timing is not so critical.

Let us know the level of information you want out of your pregnancy testing and we will make a plan with you to ensure we provide you with the data you require.

## WHEN TO CUT THE BULL@%\$!

For most herds mating should be winding down now, but the decision on when to take the plunge and actually remove those bulls can be a nervous if not completely terrifying one!!!

Has the job been done at the start of mating? Were the boys doing their bit? What's the empty rate going to be like?

There are a lot of unknowns, however one thing is for sure; you're bound to see bulling cows the day after you pull the bull, whatever date that may be!!!

Important considerations regarding mating length:

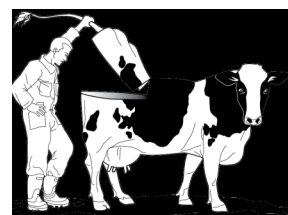
Extending mating beyond 12 weeks will have only small impact on empty rate.

Getting cows in calf early reduces late calvers more effectively than simply pulling the bulls early. By the simple fact there will be less cows left to get in calf late.

A Christmas day mating is a 6<sup>th</sup> October calving.

A very short mating e.g. 9 weeks is high risk as even an excellent result is likely to leave you with a 15% empty rate.

Once you have decided on a date to end mating it is always a good idea to remove the bulls off the farm. This should minimise surprise Christmas calves!



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## FACIAL ECZEMA CASE STUDY

### FACIAL ECZEMA – PROTECTION IS POSSIBLE

Zinc treatment by drenching, boluses or medicated feed give the most reliable protection. Dosing through the water system is the most common form of zinc treatment. It is also the most unreliable!

In a recent large scale Facial Eczema trial conducted on 105 North Island dairy herds the following conclusions were made:

- Only 29% of cows that received zinc supplementation had levels in the protective range against Facial Eczema.
- Drenching; zinc in feed; and a combination of zinc in feed + water treatment were the only methods of administering zinc that resulted in cows having zinc levels in the recommended range for protection. Water treatment alone did not provide protective levels of zinc.
- The majority of farmers are inaccurate when estimating weights of milking cows.
- Opotiki had the highest spore count of the study.
- Farmers thought that because they didn't see clinical signs of Facial Eczema, their control had worked, but production was affected.
- Some farmers were over dosing and cows had nearly toxic levels of zinc.
- Pasture spore counts varied dramatically across the same farm and even the same paddock.

### ARE YOU SCORING??

Last summer/autumn DairyNZ launched a BCS project in the Bay of Plenty. This involved monitoring BCS on 115 farms from January/February until calving. Our vets were involved in the project, scoring 36 of our clients herds. An autumn feed budget was also developed along with management advice to try and achieve the industry target of a herd BCS of 5.0, with no more than 15% of cows below this at planned start of calving (PSC).

While the full analysis is still to come from DairyNZ we have crunched the numbers on the 36 herds Veterinary Health Centre was involved in and made the following observations:

- ◆ Only 3 out of 36 herds achieved an average of BCS 5.0 at calving
- ◆ More than half of cows across all the herds were less than BCS 5.0 at the PSC
- ◆ The herds average BCS at PSC ranged from 4.2 to 5.2
- ◆ The average gain from January to PSC was 0.6 BCS
- ◆ The average gain from dry off to PSC was 0.4
- ◆ Cows gain minimal BCS while milking. The average gain in late lactation was 0.2 BCS.

Contrary to common farmer belief, achieving rapid BCS gain over the dry period **does not occur**. The results from your herds are supportive of the current science. Science that is based on over 30 years of NZ and international research. It is realistic to expect a well fed dry cow to gain 0.5 BCS in the dry.

This case is from a large herd on the Rangitikei Plains. It is an irrigated farm making it very susceptible to facial eczema. In the past there has been anywhere from 2 to 15% of cows that have displayed clinical signs of FE.

During April 2015 clinical cases of FE began to appear and blood work confirmed high levels of GGT indicating liver damage due to the toxin sporidesmin. 5% of cows suffered clinical FE and production dropped more than 10%.

Serum zinc levels averaged 15 umol/L (above 20 is protective). Despite adding zinc monohydrate to the dosatron at the rate on the bag, zinc levels were not at a protective level.

The bag dose rate is correct so what went wrong?

The cows had become less 'Crossbred' and more 'Friesian' over the years so were heavier than estimated.

The dose was rounded to the nearest half bag.

Palatability issues

Not accounting for all stock classes on the farm, water leaks and alternative water sources can also lead to incorrect dose rates.

### 2016 Summer

Zinc treatment via the dosatron was initiated in January. Blood was sampled to check serum zinc levels on Jan 25th and averaged 12.9 (target is greater than 20). Things were heading in a familiar direction...

At this point kill sheet data was used to get a more accurate cow weight and the daily dose was weighed out and marked in a container. Weekly grass samples were collected for spore counts. I have included the highest count for each month.

| Month    | Spore Count |
|----------|-------------|
| January  | 100,000     |
| February | 210,000     |
| March    | 155,000     |
| April    | 55,000      |
| May      | 0           |

After correcting the dose and receiving some dangerously high spore counts the serum zinc was retested in mid February. An average of 23.5 umol/L was achieved – above the protective level!

In late March we did another monitor bleed and again the serum zinc was in the protective range – 23 umol/L.

On farm the successful zinc dosing was evident with less than 1% of the herd displaying signs of clinical FE and no characteristic plummet in production mid-summer. Autumn health check results showed no elevation in GGT levels indicating livers free from FE damage.

### TAKE HOME POINTS:

Oral drenching, medicated in shed feed and boluses are the most effective forms of zinc administration.

Zinc water treatment is unlikely to be protective without close monitoring.

Measure serum zinc levels early in summer and monitor them through crisis periods.

Use accurate cow weights and measure daily zinc doses



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Haha

Late one night a burglar broke into a house and while he was sneaking around he heard a voice say, "Jesús is watching you." He looked around and saw nothing. He kept on creeping and again heard, "Jesús is watching you."

In a dark corner, he saw a cage with a parrot inside. The burglar asked the parrot, "Was it you who said Jesús is watching me?" The parrot replied, "Yes."

Relieved, the burglar asked, "What is your name?"

The parrot said, "Clarence."

The burglar said, "That's a stupid name for a parrot. What idiot named you Clarence?"

The parrot answered, "The same idiot that named the rottweiler Jesús."

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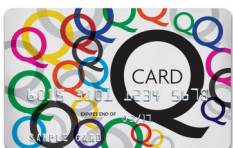
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## TIME TO WEIGH IN

If you are not regularly weighing your young stock, then why not?

Calves need to be weighed to make sure they are reaching their target weights. An LIC survey from all of their MINDA weights data showed that nationally our replacements are behind industry targets as early as weaning. It is unrealistic to expect to grow a heifer adequately if they are already behind right off the start line!

Very often heifer rearing is a neglected part of dairy farming, yet everyone knows that their heifers are the future of the business.

### WHEN RAISING REPLACEMENT HEIFERS, REMEMBER:

**Weigh them regularly** - Weigh them before they leave home and then at least every 3 months at grazing. Check them against MINDA WEIGHTS™, liveweight BV-based targets to see if they're still on track. Detect issues early and manage them to avoid problems.

The reproductive performance of replacement heifers is directly related to liveweight at mating and calving, a well-grown heifer produces more milk in their first lactation, and they survive longer in the milking herd than poorly grown animals.

**Feed Preferentially** – Feeding groups of heifers according to their weight can help ensure that smaller, lighter heifers reach their target liveweight for mating

**Looks can be deceiving** – Heifers may look like they are in good condition, but you will not know if they are reaching target weights until you weigh them.

### Testimonials:

Farmers on our weighing scheme have said “Our heifers are much better than they have been in recent years”

Comments from farm workers “How long have you been doing that for because the 2yr olds have come back much better”

We can help you set up your young stock health plan or arrange to have your replacements weighed and monitored regularly. Call the clinic to discuss your options.

Did you ever wonder why men wear earrings?

A man noticed a co-worker wearing an earring. The man knows his co-worker is a conservative fellow and is curious about his sudden change in ‘fashion sense’.

The man walks up to him and says, “I didn’t know you were into earrings”.

“Don’t make such a big deal, its only an earring” he replies sheepishly. His friend falls silent for a few minutes, but then his curiosity prods him to ask, “So how long have you been wearing it?”

“Ever since my wife found it in my truck”.



## DECREASE IN BVD

Exposure levels to BVD in most herds have decreased significantly compared with results from last season and prior. Many herds that usually have high to moderate antibodies have this year dropped to low levels. And this season for the first time we have seven herds showing NO exposure to BVD compared with one previously. Only one farm I have reported on actually had an increase in exposure; all other farms decreased or had no change. Last season we had three herds with a PI, this year only one. There are major production and reproduction benefits because less BVD infections is being passed around your herd.

### So why the drop?

Our work to reduce PI's within herds has been effective.

Our surveillance of pre-weaned calves has removed 20-30 PI's over the last three years.

Less stock being sent away to grazing, which is a major risk.

Less replacement cows purchased, therefore less cows of unknown status entering the farm and also less transport contact.

However, the risk of a new incursion into your herd remains high. The disease is largely uncontrolled in non-dairy stock. Blood testing calves and new arrivals, and vaccination of young stock remain our key recommendations.

## TIPS FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS

- Facial Eczema monitoring
- Pre order Faceguard—Beat 2017 price rise
- Weigh Calves
- Condition score cows
- Trace element testing
- Parasite treatment young stock
- Lepto vaccinations
- Pregnancy testing
- Flea, tick and worm treat all your small animals

### Vets:

Chris Peterson  
Sandra Hegh  
Joanne Allan  
Brenner Barber  
Mark Howell  
Gillian Hogarth  
Sally Gummer  
Anna Cochrane  
Ben Miller  
Heather Wise  
Carolyn Hamill

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