GREYMOUTH

September/October Newsletter

West Coast Vets

Greymouth Gossip

We're happy to have Molly back on board after her European adventure. She immersed herself in the Roman and Greek classics around the Mediterranean – seeing all the ancient sites – and she also thoroughly enjoyed Italy's great cuisine. She's ready to lead the disbudding charge this spring.

Now it's Kate's turn to head overseas. She's travelling to South Africa in October to visit her partner's relatives for three weeks and is especially excited about looking for the African Big 5 on safari.

Every year, as a way of supporting the Cancer Society's Daffodil Day, Maria cooks up some delicious treats for the our team, who donate money to indulge in the food. $195.50 was raised for the charity this year – thanks Maria! Also, Nadine has called in a few times with baby Taylor. Both are doing really well and Taylor is growing fast.

Sadly, we have a few goodbyes to say:

After over 20 years on our team, Marjan has decided to step away and pursue more of her passion in nutrition. She will be leaving at the start of November to begin a new role as the lead vet at a national nutritional business. She originally started at Grey Vets and is now one of our longest serving members. Her years of local knowledge and vet experience will be a big hole to fill.

Marvin is leaving to retun to Paraguay and will also be finishing up in November. He and his family have really enjoyed experiencing life in New Zealand, but it's time for them to head home to be close to extended family. He will be starting a role as a vet for a dairy corporation over there. We will really miss his cruisy, laid-back manner.

Lastly, our clinic co-ordinator, Alicia, has taken an exciting new step in her career and is joining Development West Coast as their lead events organiser. She's been here at the vets for over 10 years and will be sorely missed.

A lame cow is a cow in pain

By Marvin Wiens

Lameness is one of the most costly and painful problems in dairy herds.

A lame cow eats less, which means she then produces less, and she'll be more likely to struggle getting in calf. Good prevention and early action when you do have a case saves you time and money, and improves animal welfare.

Let's take a look at the causes of hoof pain, treatment guidelines for this type of lameness, and strategies to minimise its occurrence.

Checklist

COWS

- Continue magnesium supplementing.
- Take pre-treatment milk samples from mastitis cases.
- Metricheck cows, ideally in batches so the whole herd is checked. **Book in with us!**
- BVD vaccinate naive herds.
- BCS to assess condition prior to mating.
- Check copper and selenium levels in the lead up to mating.
- Pre-mating tail paint and heat detecting – make sure to record heats.
- Identify and treat non-cycling cows.

CALVES

- Maintain hygiene in calf pens and ensure fresh water and meal are always available.
- Disbud from two weeks of age. **Book in with us!**
- Vaccinate with Covexin 10.
- Keep an eye out for any sick calves.

YEARLINGS

- Drench.
- BVD vaccinate.
- Check copper and selenium levels in the lead up to mating.
- Check weight gain – target weight >60% mature weight at mating.

BULLS

- How many bulls do you need?
- Do you have reserve bulls organised?
- BVD test and vaccinate – vet certificates available for selling of loan bulls.
- Check for lameness.

Main causes:

- Previous hoof problems and chronic trauma.
- Infections (e.g. footrot, digital dermatitis).
- Difficult tracks and surfaces – think sharp stones, rough concrete, or muddy gateways.
- The way cows are handled, including rushing the herd, overcrowding, and long stand times.
- Sudden diet changes, mineral or fibre problems, or other nutrition issues.

Treatment:

1. Trim the hoof and sole to remove any dead or underrun tissue and release any pus.
2. Put a block on the sound claw to remove pressure and help healing.
3. Give antibiotics for cases where swelling or infection is obvious.
4. Consider pain relief (NSAIDs) for faster recovery and better welfare.
5. Keep them in a hospital paddock with soft ground, and easy feed and water access until recovered.

Prevention:

- ✓ Good tracks that are smooth, wide, well-draining, and clear of sharp stones.
- ✓ Gentle cow flow where cows are able to walk at their own pace.
- ✓ Minimised yard time to reduce time spent standing on concrete.
- ✓ A clean environment; reduce mud where possible and keep concrete stone-free.
- ✓ Balanced feeding, with sudden changes avoided.
- ✓ Routine checks and trimming – spot problems early!

Our message:

Most lameness is preventable. Good tracks, calm handling, and quick treatment keep cows productive and comfortable.

LEARN MORE ABOUT

LAME COWS

Come along on Thursday 13 November for a workshop about treating and preventing lameness. Engaging theory session at the Union Hotel, followed by a hands-on practical session back at the clinic. Only $120 per person.

RSVP to mariav@wcvets.co.nz or call 03 768 0370 – spaces are limited so get in quick.

Preparing for reproduction

By Laurence Cohen

There's an old saying "a stitch in time saves nine" – and when it comes to reproduction it's no exception. There are a lot of ways to try to optimise your cows getting back in-calf as quickly as possible.

Firstly, make sure your herd is on a rising plane of nutrition. For a nutritional consultation, get in touch with us. Make the most of our vet Marjan, who is a registered nutritionist, before she leaves for her new role!

Then look into their trace elements levels, especially copper, magnesium, selenium, and iodine. We can take some blood and liver samples for testing to see if they are deficient in anything. It's important to get copper supplementation sorted sooner rather than later, as the copper injection does decrease conception rate for a couple of weeks after administration.

Is the uterus ready to maintain another pregnancy? It's a big ask for an organ to go from containing about 100L volume (including a living fetus) to being ready to conceive again in just a couple of months, but that is what we ask of our cows. Metrichecking is the best way to identify any post-calving infections and treat them. The ideal time to check is 10-14 days following calving. We recommend checking the whole herd, which can be done in batches. Book us to come metricheck!

As we approach mating, identifying non-cycling cows is very important to be able to increase your 3-week submission rate. A key way to maximise your number of days in milk and cows in-calf is to achieve a great 3-week submission rate.

Track whether cows have cycled automatically with wearable technology, or by tail painting at least three weeks prior to your planned start of mating. Once you know the cows that have not had a visible heat, we can help you make a plan depending on the number of non-cyclers, their ages, and the length of time since they calved.

The industry target is to serve 90% of the herd in the first three weeks. Working off a conception rate of around 50% this should give you an in-calf rate of around 45% at three weeks, following on to a 77% 6-week in-calf rate.

As well as intervening with non-cyclers, you can also manipulate cycling cows to achieve these submission rates and more days in milk next season. 'Why Wait' is a PG programme that causes the cows that would cycle in week two of mating to cycle during week one of mating, and cows that would cycle in week three to cycle during week two. This only works on cows that have had a pre-mating heat.

Something to consider: there is a growing trend of short gestation genetics being used to consolidate the calving period, from the same length mating period. This certainly has its advantages by giving more time for the cows to get back in calf, generally smaller calves leading to fewer calving issues, and more days in milk overall. This does require AI at the end of mating, which does not necessarily work with all farm set ups, and it will deliver calves thick and fast, so farm systems and infrastructure need to be ready for this.

For more info on reproduction and maximising performance, please give us a ring – let's discuss your repro numbers and goals together.

WHAT'S YOUR NUMBER?

MANAGING MASTITIS

<3%
per month

Look for cases during milking and test some milk samples

DOWN COWS

<3%
over spring

Supplement appropriately and consider a bolus for affected cows

METRI-CHECKING

10-14
days after calving

Aim for at least two whole herd metrichecks to cover the calving season

BODY CONDITION SCORING

≥4.5
BCS average

Support low-scorers, as lighter cows will take longer to get in calf

PRE-MATING HEAT DETECTING

4-5
weeks before mating

Get your eye in ahead of mating – two detection aids are better than one

PRE-MATING CYCLING RATE

>75%
10 days before mating

Identify any non-cycling cows so you can treat them prior to mating

DAILY SUBMISSION RATE

4.3%+
per day

Work out how many cows this means for you and meet your daily target

90% SUBMISSION RATE

90%
in 3 weeks

Mating cows early gives them more chances of getting in calf

If you aren't hitting these numbers, give your KeyVet a call to see how you can get your numbers back on track!

Trace elements: Are your results normal?

By Marjan Sprock

Our advice as vets is to check your stock's trace element levels before mating, even if your mineral supplementation hasn't changed or you tested cull cows at dry off.

Unfortunately each season is different and results can change. This season, for example, has been very abnormal...

We had cull cows which were very high in some minerals, but then the levels in bloods taken from cows on-farm were low (so the cows tested at the works were NOT the ones from this farm)!

We experienced unusually high levels of magnesium in springers, which caused a lot of down cows.

We saw high levels of fatty acids (from fat break down) in springers who had good body condition scores, indicating there's too much fat loss happening, which can cause trouble at mating time.

We took blood and liver samples from once-a-day and twice-a-day milking farms where the milk production ranged from 300MS/cow to over 500MS/cow, to compare what the mineral levels were like. And yes, even the high producers also had issues!

So, let's take a look at the types of trace element issues you might face.

Copper deficiency can have many negative effects. One of the more concerning ones for farmers is that each litre of milk contains a standard amount of copper, so deficiency leads to lower milk production.

A copper deficiency is often the result of a lack of copper itself, but it can also be because of an overload of copper antagonists.

For example, copper does not get absorbed well when there is too much molybdenum and sulphur present, and absorption is also negatively affected with high iron, high manganese or even high zinc levels. As the molybdenum or sulphur applications in your fertiliser can change year by year, copper levels need to be monitored yearly.

Copper is stored in the liver and the body tries to maintain serum copper levels in the blood at the same level. Therefore, liver biopsies (taken from live animals on-farm) will show us the storage levels of copper and can show deficiencies before the serum levels go down and visual symptoms arise.

Magnesium deficiency is serious and it can cause grass staggers and milk fever.

We all know it's important to supplement magnesium at calving time, but low or marginal levels around mating can also cause issues. Cycling cows move more than usual and this activity requires more minerals to support body functions. So, if cows with poor levels cycle, there is a higher possibility of them going down.

Too much magnesium is also an issue. This can happen because an individual cow has simply had a higher daily intake or because there is too much supplementation for the herd in general.

We have to ask questions about management and test to be able to make a distinction between the two. Magnesium is not stored in the body, so the level in the blood is an indication of the intake in the last 24-48 hours.

Selenium deficiency is very common across our farms.

Besides being required for immunity, selenium is also required for fertility and growth – it's a very important trace element. High somatic cell counts, more mastitis cases, and having to treat mastitis for longer, can all be part of a deficiency in selenium.

Cows with low levels of selenium can have a normal submission rate, but the conception rate will be reduced. Unfortunately, you will only find that out at pregnancy testing time, which is too late to change anything.

Be proactive instead of reactive. If you call us out to do some blood tests to check your cows' levels now, and treat if needed, then you should have fewer empty cows to cull.

In summary, we highly recommend getting some blood and liver samples taken to check if your results are normal. At the same time, you can also check your levels of calcium, NEFA (fatty acids) and/or BOHB (beta-hydroxy butyrate – ketone produced by the liver). Make sure your herd is at their best for reproductive success.

Remember, you can't improve what you don't measure!

The benefits of heat detecting before mating

By Molly Kells

Pre-mating heat detection has several benefits – and they make up for the amount of tail paint used!

By observing and recording your cows' heats before the start of mating, you can make more informed decisions that ultimately improve herd reproductive performance, farm profitability, and long-term sustainability. Here's how:

1. Identifying non-cycling cows early

One of the key advantages of pre-mating heat detection is the ability to spot cows that are not cycling. Detecting non-cyclers before the planned start of mating allows you to:

- Prioritise nutrition or management changes to help stimulate cycling.
- Treat cows promptly with veterinary or management interventions.
- Reduce the proportion of cows that remain empty at the end of mating.

2. Improving submission rates

A high 3-week submission rate is strongly linked with good in-calf outcomes. Cows that are detected on heat pre-mating can be drafted and managed to ensure they are ready for insemination once mating begins, lifting early submission rates.

By monitoring heats ahead of mating, you can build confidence that your herd is cycling well and prepare to start mating strong.

3. Assessing herd reproductive performance

Pre-mating heat detection acts as a diagnostic tool, giving you an early indication of herd reproductive status.

If large numbers of your cows are not showing heats, it may signal underlying issues such as: poor body condition or nutrition, trace element or metabolic deficiencies, and/or lameness or other health challenges.

Having a chance to address issues before mating begins helps set the herd up for a more successful repro season.

4. Reducing empty rates and lifting profitability

Ultimately, the goal of pre-mating heat detection is to maximise the number of cows getting in-calf as early as possible. Early conceived cows have more days in milk, have a tighter calving spread, and are more likely to re-calve again the following season.

Lower empty rates mean fewer replacements need to be reared or purchased, reducing costs and improving long-term herd efficiency.

Pre-mating heat detection is more than just a management task, it's a strategic tool for reproduction success.

Tips on the tools

Our mission is to share advice that helps you on the farm – and often the most interesting and unusual tips come from farmers themselves, who've found something that works for them.

This time's tip was shown to one of our vets by a local farmer during a weekend call-out. The farmer used this trick to get a stubborn cow that was lying down to stand up. Please note, she MUST be physically able to stand up, if she's down due to metabolic issues/sickness/injury this will not help. Place a clean rectal glove over her nose and mouth, and after a couple of failed breaths she will get to her feet. Make sure to IMMEDIATELY remove the glove as she stands to allow her to get her breath back.

If you have a tip you would like to share, let us know and we'll add it to a future newsletter.