



We are sorry to announce that Sarah will be leaving us in December. After 3 years with us she is heading off to Australia to spend a bit of time seeing another part of the world and swap a British winter for an antipodean summer - who can blame her! Sarah first met some of you as a 4th year vet student at the University of

Nottingham and over the last 2 years of the course she spent a fair bit of time seeing practice with us. She impressed us with her enthusiasm for farm animal work and we had no hesitation in offering her a position as a newly graduated vet. Over the 3 years she has been with us she has become a key member of the team and has helped many of you with improving your herd health. We very much thank her for all her efforts as part of the team and wish her every success for her trip. Who knows, we may even see her in these parts again in the years to come. **Ben**

Managing the downer cow (Sarah)

Probably some of the most frustrating and time consuming cases, from both the farms perspective and our own, are downer cows. Firstly, it is important to define the difference between a down cow and a downer cow:

Down cow – Due to a specific cause (e.g. hypocalcaemia, injury, metritis)

Downer cow – A secondary ‘syndrome’ that develops due to a cow not standing for an extended period of time (compression of leg, leading to swelling and nerve damage)

The rate at which ‘downer cow syndrome’ develops is likely to depend upon the initial cause of the animal being down, the surface on which it is kept, the size/weight of the animal, and the ability of the animal to shift its own weight from one side to the other. In order to give downer cows the best possible chance of getting up, it is important to provide the following:

Lying surface – Cows should be moved **immediately** to a clean, dry, warm, comfortable (deep bedded), non-slippery surface. Delaying movement for even a couple of hours can be the difference between recovery and non-recovery.

Food/water – Provision of ad-lib, good quality feedstuff and water is essential, often this means putting it right under their nose. If a cow isn't drinking, it may be necessary to stomach tube them. Top tip - sick cows often prefer to drink warm water.

‘Turning’ – Animals that aren't shifting their own weight should be turned every 3 hours. Manipulating the legs (flexing/ extending) when turning will encourage blood flow and reduce the chance of damage. If muscle damage develops, it may be fatal.

Milking – Every 12 hours, for comfort and to reduce the chance of mastitis.

Encourage standing – If the animal will not attempt to stand, lifting aids may be required. This should be attempted twice daily, depending on the condition causing her to be down initially.

Drugs – Use of long-acting pain relief is imperative in downer animals, to ease pain and improve their demeanour.

TLC!! – This often makes the difference between recovery and euthanasia. We often hear of downer cows that suddenly get up after 2 weeks of repeated lifting, so it is worth persisting, as TLC pays off!

Sheep Lameness (Maarten)

We have had some reports of rising levels of lameness in recent weeks. Scald, foot rot and Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis (CODD) are possible causes. Starting a prevention plan early will help that problems won't spiral out of control later on in the season. It is always advisable to separate lame animals in their own pen so as to minimise spread to other animals. Prevention and treatment for the 3 common causes of lameness is different therefore it is important that the diagnosis is correct. It also gives the opportunity to talk about the current treatment protocols and discuss the effectiveness of these treatments. The welfare aspect of lameness has gained in importance in recent years. This has resulted in more work being done by researchers all over the world. This means that the knowledge on prevention and treatment has also evolved. Let us help you tackle the lameness in your flock!



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Bluetongue (Sarah)

With us hearing a lot in the farming press about new cases of Bluetongue in France, it is worth a bit of memory jogging as to what to look out for and what to do if you suspect that you have a case:
Sheep (most severely infected) – ulcers in the mouth, discharge of mucus and drooling from the mouth, swelling of mouth/head/neck and coronary band (where skin of leg meets the horn), red skin, fever, lameness, breathing problems, blue tongue (very uncommon feature of the disease)

Cattle (often show no signs) – swelling and ulcers in the mouth, nasal discharge, red skin and eyes, swollen/red teats, tiredness, fever

If you suspect this, or any other notifiable disease, then you must inform your local APHA office immediately. You will receive a visit from an APHA vet, where samples may be taken and you may be placed under restriction as a control measure. If you are unsure about anything, of course you can give one of us a call too!

New Zealand Dairy Update (Amy)

I feel a little smug when I think of how hard my colleagues in NZ will have been working. They have been in the thick of it, with calving beginning on 1st August, by now hopefully most of the cows will be calved, and they will be mating which started on 22nd October. The aim of most herds is to have around 78% cows in calf by 6 weeks so you can see this means an intense calving period in August followed shortly by an intense period of mating. The plus side of this is that from January onwards most people can relax a little but right now they'll be working incredibly hard to tidy things up before mating begins.

It's been a cold winter in South Island but as I understand not catastrophic (except for the payout!) and the cows have calved relatively well. Because the herds are so big we have to look at ways of examining animals in both a time efficient and effective way to make sure they are in the best possible condition for mating. So rather than doing postnatal checks by vaginal and scanning the uterus to identify endometritis we do something called 'metrichecking'. Basically this is a small scoop on the end of a rod which we insert into the vagina to see if there is any pus present. It is quick but unfortunately not that accurate however when there are a thousand cows to examine currently there is no other better way economically. We would check cows between 2-4 weeks calved so often would do around 3 visits per farm during a milking. Cows are graded 0 to 3 depending on the amount of pus and then drafted off if they need treating. Treatment would usually be Metricure or prostaglandin injection depending on the severity and time since calving. Additionally to this we might examine the 'at risk' cows on a weekly or fortnightly basis. These are cows that have had RFM, assisted calvings, twins, downer cows etc.



Cows will also be bled to check trace element status prior to mating as many areas are low in selenium or copper and it is vital the cows are not depleted of these at mating. The grass growth will be regularly measured and monitored and many farms now individually condition score their cows. Vaccines such as BVD will also need to be given at this time.

Meanwhile many calves will now be outside; it is normal for them to go outside at around 3 weeks and be kept in groups of about 40-50. They then are usually weaned on reaching 100kg. Many farmers now weigh their heifers monthly from weaning to ensure they achieve the correct growth rates. This was something I was surprised to find many farms don't do here, especially in all year round systems where it must be really hard to know if they are meeting their targets each month.

Around the middle of September all the calved cows will be tail painted and then any animals not cycling 10 days prior to mating are usually assessed by a vet and treated depending what is found on the ovaries. Some farms like to synchronise cycling cows using the 'why wait' program which effectively tightens the calving pattern by around 10 days. This usually results in cows being painted many colours! (see pic)

Achieving such tight calving patterns is not easy and it is important to get the basics right in several areas. These are the '8 pieces of the pie' as kiwis would say: Body condition and Nutrition, Cow health, Calf and heifer management, Heat detection, AI technique and sire selection, Dealing with non-cyclers, Bull management, Calving pattern

Discussing these in depth goes beyond the scope of this article. However I do want to point out improving reproductive performance isn't rocket science, sometimes we get too focused on one aspect of where things may have gone wrong and it is important to remember to step back a little and look at all the 8 points above. These apply whether you are seasonal or all year round, there just isn't so much pressure in an all year round calving system. Often it is a combination of small things impacting on fertility and making adjustments in a few areas can really help. If you have concerns with fertility on your farm do talk to your vet and perhaps make time to sit down to go through the fertility issues in a logical order as this can be far more beneficial than odd discussions during a routine visit.



Metrichecking