May 2025

What's Up Doc?

By Jackie Davies

Firstly, a big congratulations to Oscar, who got married during the Easter weekend and is now off on his honeymoon!

The recent rain has been welcome, and with the warm weather holding, hopefully some grass cover will build up for the winter. A lot of supplement is being fed out at the moment, including by the autumn calvers. Unfortunately, there have been some high facial eczema spore counts following the rain - hopefully they haven't caught too many people out.

We've had our vet and tech teams out helping to dry off cows, and soon it will be time for heifer teat sealing too. If you'd like to have help with your dry cow job, book in with us ASAP to secure a time that suits you.

Now is great time to think about other jobs such as vaccinating your stock against Lepto. Most of our farmers successfully changed over to the new vaccine, Lepto 4-Way, last year and will be back to a single vaccination for the herd this year. Some heifers that were away grazing last year may not have made the change, so we'd still recommend a booster shot for them. It's also a good idea to consider vaccinating your cows with calf scour vaccines. When used correctly they can prevent common causes of scours like rotavirus, coronavirus, and *E.coli K99* on your farm. If you're unsure whether they could help with your calf scour issues, have a chat with your vet.

We recommend checking your herd's mineral levels before wintertime, when the highest requirement for copper in a heavily pregnant cow coincides with the lowest levels in the grass.

When we visit for mineral testing, we can also look for facial eczema damage at the same time. There have been high eczema counts at different times over the summer and autumn this season.

VETERINARY CLINIC MORRINSVILLE

What's happening on-farm?

- Herd dry-off
- Heifer teat sealing
- RVM and milk quality consults
- Vaccinations
- Mineral testing



Sealing the deal

By Oscar Porras

It's time to maximise heifer health with teat sealing!

With the dry period fast approaching for our spring herds, drying off the cows is a key focus for every farmer. Dry-off involves placing either antibiotics, teat sealant, or both, into each of the cow's teats in a sterile manner.

Teat sealing heifers, often considered a preventive measure, involves the application of a protective barrier to the teats of our first-time calvers. Teatseal is typically a flexible sealant which forms a physical barrier against pathogens, preventing infections such as mastitis during the crucial precalving period.

The main benefits of teat sealing are:

1. Reduced risk of mastitis

Mastitis not only affects milk production, but also poses a significant health risk to the heifer. Teat sealing acts as a shield, guarding against the entry of bacteria and reducing the likelihood of mastitis development. 2. Enhanced udder health

By creating a protective barrier, teat sealing helps maintain the integrity of the udder tissue. This promotes healthier udders, ensuring the heifers are in optimal condition for lactation once they calve.

3. Improved milk quality

Mastitis impacts milk quantity and also compromises its quality. Teat sealing contributes

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to better milk quality by preventing bacterial contamination, resulting in higher yields of premium-grade milk.

4. Early investment, long-term gains

Incorporating teat sealing into your heifer management practices represents an investment in their future health and productivity. By preventing mastitis early on, you're laying the foundation for a productive and profitable herd.

5. Ease of application

Teat sealing is a straightforward procedure that can be easily integrated into existing herd management routines. With minimal time and effort required, it offers a high return on investment in terms of heifer health and performance.

6. Environmental friendliness

Teat sealing reduces the need for antibiotic treatments, aligning with sustainable farming practices and promoting animal welfare.

As we gear up for the calving season, it's essential to prioritise proactive measures like teat sealing to safeguard the health and wellbeing of our heifers. By investing in preventive care today, we're ensuring a brighter, healthier future for our herd and our farm.

Image credit: Zoetis NZ





In the coming months, as plants grow rapidly after a hot, dry summer - while mornings remain chilly and overcast - conditions are ideal for nitrate toxicity. Young, fast-growing grass and recent nitrogen fertiliser application increase the risk.

If you're concerned that a pasture coming up in your rotation may be high in nitrates, it's best to test it. A cow can die within one hour of eating a high level of nitrates, so prevention is a lot better than trying to deal with the disastrous consequences of having nitrate toxicity on a herd scale.

You can bring in a sample of grass to us for testing. Alternatively, we sell nitrate kits so you can test your pasture on-farm and get real-time results before deciding to graze a paddock that day.

If you have a certain paddock or area of your farm that is known to be high in nitrates, here are a few basic management practices you can follow to decrease the risk:

- Don't put hungry stock onto a pasture with moderate to marginally high nitrate levels. This means not letting the cows go from milking straight onto these paddocks. It's best to let them graze for about three hours on a low-nitrate pasture before moving them into the new paddock that has higher nitrate levels. This way they'll be full and won't gorge the grass.
- Only graze any marginally highnitrate pasture for a maximum of one hour. Moderate-nitrate pasture can be grazed for a few hours, but it's best to offer plenty of hay as well.
- Never graze pastures with very high levels of nitrate.
- Nitrate levels are highest in the morning and decrease as the day goes on, so it's best to graze cows on pastures with higher nitrate levels in the early afternoon.
- Nitrate levels can vary from day to day. The worst conditions are warm and overcast days.

New DairySmart milk testing machine

We now have a milk culturing incubator with AI reading capabilities in our clinic!

This new machine can accurately identify many causes of mastitis after only 1-2 days incubation. It significantly reduces the time lag for results, as there's no need to send the milk samples to a lab.

It also offers a cost-effective test for high somatic cell count (SCC) cows, helping distinguish between Strep and Staph – which could be a real advantage when making decisions coming up to dry-off.

The DairySmart machine offers two types of incubation plates:

- In-season plates which have four different growth mediums to help identify the different bacteria causing mastitis in a single culture, without needing extra tests done in a lab.
- High SCC plates which have only two growth mediums, but the plates can be set up for two cows to be cultured per plate to keep the costs down.

The benefit of DairySmart over Mastatest is that the number of samples we can test at once isn't as limited. Rather than testing only a few milk samples, this new machine enables us to test more than 20 at a time.

Remember, all classes of stock can get nitrate poisoning, from calves to cows.

Signs to watch for in suspected nitrate toxicity include:

- Discomfort and kicking at their abdomen,
- Getting up and down frequently,
- · Increased breathing effort and rate,
- Eventual difficulty standing and collapse.

If you are worried about the levels of nitrates on your farm, test your grass! If you suspect a nitrate toxicity outbreak, time is critical, so call us as soon as possible.



With herd Leptospirosis (Lepto) vaccinations about to start, it's a good time to remember why we vaccinate for this disease.

Lepto can cause sickness and abortions in some dairy cows, and in others it may cause no symptoms and they simply carry the bacteria and pass it to others. Lepto is likely to be contracted by unvaccinated calves from their first autumn onwards, and can be shed by an infected animal in their urine for years.

As a zoonotic disease, it's easily spread from animals to humans. There are plenty of people who have had Lepto if you ask around – and they don't recommend it!

Mild cases tend to show flu-like symptoms, with a fever and headache, but many cases are worse than this, with liver and kidney damage. One New Zealand study showed half of people who had contracted Lepto still had symptoms eight months later.

When we recommend vaccinating dairy herds it's more for human health and the safety of farmers, farm workers, and their families, as well as related jobs such as vets and meat workers. Unfortunately there is no human vaccine.

However, correct vaccination of your cows is not the only way to protect yourself from getting sick with Lepto.

Other things that can help are:

- Keeping clear of urine spray and standing water,
- Wearing appropriate protective gear, including gloves and gumboots,
- · Keeping any cuts well covered,
- Not eating, drinking, smoking or vaping while milking.

Lepto bacteria usually enter through cuts or mucous membranes (the moist areas in the eyes, nose and mouth).

Also, consider other animals and wildlife that could spread Lepto amongst your stock or the people on your farm.

Pigs are becoming uncommon now on dairy farms, but they are more of a risk than cows for passing Lepto onto other animals and people. So don't keep pigs near the milking shed or calf sheds. There is a Lepto vaccine available for pigs if you have them on-farm, which is different from the cattle vaccine.

Rat control on the farm, especially around the sheds, is crucial as rats are major carriers of Lepto. Always wear gloves when cleaning where rats have contaminated an area.

Last year, we began vaccinating our dairy herds with a new Lepto vaccine for cattle, Lepto 4-Way.

This vaccine was created because many of the human cases of Lepto

in New Zealand in recent years were shown to have been from a new strain of Lepto, *Pacifica*, which may be on up to three quarters of farms nationwide! The Lepto 4-Way vaccine covers this *Pacifica* strain, as well as the other strains, *Harjo*, *Pomona* and *Copenhageni*.

Most of our farmers' cows should be fully converted to Lepto 4-Way, but if you had heifers off at grazing last year, there may be some that have yet to have the new vaccine and may need a booster to be fully covered. If in doubt, give us a ring.



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