June 2025

VETERINARY CLINIC
MORRINSVILLE

What's Up Doc?

By Jackie Davies

It's been a busy old time for our dairy team, as we know it has been for you too.

While Oscar is back from his honeymoon looking tanned and relaxed, Richard recently had a close call with a rather mad cow and Gus is going to be taking a break from us for a few months to calve his own herd.

Our techs are running a smooth show this year, as we now transition from inserting dry cow to inserting teat seal.

Out on farm, it's concerning to have a number of herds test positive for Salmonella in the middle of May. Be proactive in seeking answers if you have cows with diarrhoea, abortions, or just general off-colour – especially if you have multiple cows on successive days.

Remember to check for cancer eye when you move the cows. Often only the back end of the cow is seen up close, leading to cancer eye cases being more advanced than is ideal when finally found. It's so much easier to treat them early than too late. Remember to put any treated cows on the future cull list, as they are still at risk of the cancer regrowing within the year.

It's now time to test and treat for copper deficiency. If you have your Lepto vaccinations still to do, it's a great idea to get blood tests and/or liver biopsies from a few animals to check for mineral levels at the same time.

Happy new dairy season everyone!

What's happening on-farm?

- **Heifer teat sealing**
- **Mating autumn calvers**
- **Vaccinations**
- **Check mineral status of herd**
- **Copper supplementation**
- **Start magnesium supplementation**
- **Look out for dry cow mastitis**
- **Clean calf sheds**
- **Get prepared for calving**

Salmonella cases locally

By Jackie Davies

We currently have a few herds with confirmed cases of Salmonellosis.

The *Salmonella Bovismorbificans* strain of this disease causes severe diarrhoea and has been linked to abortions. Other clinical signs of Salmonella in a herd can range from a mild drop in milk production, to deaths from toxic shock in more severe cases.

Changes in diet or stressful events (e.g. transport, calving, or overcrowding) can cause changes in a cow's gut flora, leading to clinical disease. It's also been shown that high levels of magnesium oxide supplementation can alter the gut pH and contribute to the bacteria taking hold.

Salmonella spreads rapidly, with cows often showing symptoms within 1-2 days of contracting the disease.

Management practices that can help reduce the spread of infection include:

- **Vaccinate** stock against the disease.
- **Reduce stress** and manage stressful times for your cows well.
- **Control pests** (rodents and birds), especially around feed silos.
- **Good effluent management**, including 4-5 week grazing stand-down periods after spreading it on pasture, or putting it on crop instead.
- **Strict biosecurity**, such as quarantining new animals when they arrive on-farm before introducing them to the herd.

Salmonella bacteria is usually spread through faeces, from infected cows or wild animals. It can also easily spread to humans.

People can get quite sick from Salmonellosis, so it's essential to follow good hygiene practices at all times on farm – and it's especially important if you know your herd has Salmonella. Wear gloves when working with cattle and when cleaning farm equipment or buildings. Make sure you always thoroughly wash your hands before eating or drinking.

We also recommend not drinking raw milk from the vat, as raw milk consumption is a common way of humans get infected with Salmonella.

Give us a call ASAP if you have any concerns with sick cows in your herd.

Acorn poisoning

By Alvin Stanley

Something different to think about at this time of year is acorn poisoning.

This poisoning is caused from a substance called ‘tannins’ contained within acorns themselves, but also found in oak tree leaves, young shoots, and even the bark.

Stock usually get ill from eating the acorns. Unripe acorns are a lot more toxic, so pay close attention to strong winds bringing down crops of acorns before they’re naturally ready to drop.

Cattle and sheep are more likely to ingest acorns in an area when feed is tight, however, any exposure to acorns or oak trees could lead to issues.

Clinical signs of acorn poisoning are vague and often hard to spot, but are quite severe. The tannins initially cause damage to the intestinal tract, which may go unnoticed at first. However, it’s the severe damage to the kidneys that will cause the most life threatening problems, usually starting to develop within 3-7 days after ingestion.

Animals will become depressed and go off feed, with symptoms including abdominal discomfort, diarrhoea and increased urination. The poisoning eventually leads to death, which may occur up to four weeks after ingestion.

There’s no cure for this nasty issue, so prevention is the best medicine. If you have oak trees on your farm, keeping animals fenced away from these areas is the best way to avoid any problems – particularly in late autumn when acorns typically fall.

Cancer eye – it pays to check!

When you’re working at the back-end of a cow every day, it’s easy to miss what’s going on at the front-end. However, it should be good stockmanship and practice to look, periodically, for signs of cancer eye.

As the name suggests, cancer eye (otherwise known as squamous cell carcinoma) is a cancer of the eye, which can affect the eyelids, eyeball or ‘third eyelid’ (the eyelid that slides across the eye) and it is as bad as it sounds!

Why do cows get it?

Environmental, viral and genetic factors are said to play a role in this tumour’s development. It is most commonly seen in unpigmented tissue (commonly white-faced animals, but it is not just localised to these) and is related to ultraviolet radiation – not too dissimilar to skin cancer in humans.

What does it look like?

The initial stages of cancer eye are usually slow. It may just present as a tiny, knobbly growth on the third eyelid, which can be hard to detect. Cows may have a slight discharge from the eye, due to irritation.

Over time, the tumour will (usually) continue to grow in size, eventually becoming a large mass that becomes necrotic and foul smelling.

If the tumour spreads, it can also cause the lymph nodes around the cow’s head to swell up.

What should you do about it?

Quite often, people initially confuse cancer eye with pink eye and treat it with a tube of eye ointment, which will offer no improvement. After this, a vet visit is highly recommended.

Like most types of cancer, early detection leads to better outcomes. Early surgical removal of the lesion provides the best outcome and the prognosis is a lot better when the lesion is small in size, as we are able to get good margins. A cell left behind is enough to seed another tumour!

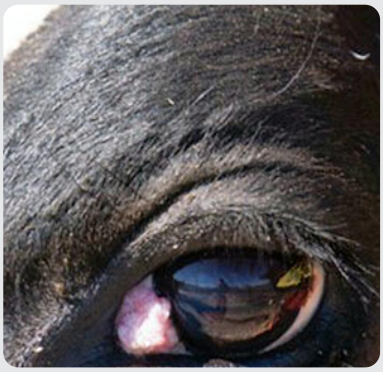
Sometimes, just the third eyelid can be removed, while other times, the whole eye might need to come out. In some cases, nothing can be done and calling pet food is the only option left.

If the tumour has invaded local lymph nodes, or has migrated into tissues around the eye, then removal is not an option.

Be aware that transportation to the works is not permitted when she has reached this stage. Only a very small cancer eye is allowed, if certified by a vet.

If in doubt, get it checked out!

If you see a tumour in your herd, get it checked! Even if you just flick your vet a photo, we can usually give you an indication as to whether it needs to be examined more closely, or removed, leading to a much better outcome for all!



Early stages of cancer eye, as above, can easily be removed and are less likely to recur.

Later stages of cancer eye, as above, can still be removed, but the chance of recurrence is high.

Abortions: How many is too many?

By Jackie Davies

It can be disheartening when you see your cows slipping, especially after all the effort you put in over mating.

The reality is, a certain number of slips are inevitable. But it's still worthwhile keeping an eye on how many you have and trying to avoid those that can be managed out of the equation.

So, what's normal? It's common to see about 2-5% of your cows abort, and another 3% may abort unseen.

Some possible causes of abortions in cattle include:

- **Nitrate poisoning.**
- **Ingestion of toxic plants** (especially Macrocarpa or any species of pine tree).
- **Salmonella infection** (not every strain causes abortions, but they do happen occasionally).
- **Bovine Viral Diarrhoea infection**, which can cause anything from early embryonic loss and calf abortions, to calves being born ok but not thriving, depending on the stage of pregnancy the cow gets infected at.
- ***Neospora caninum* infection**, which can cause an abortion or a mummified foetus. While dogs are commonly involved with the *Neospora* lifecycle, infected cows spreading the parasites and cow-to-cow transmission via aborted material are also ways the disease can be transmitted.
- **Consumption of bad quality silage** – grass silage that's been poorly preserved can grow the bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes*. Soil contamination in the silage, low dry matter content, or poor fermentation can all reduce the quality. While abortions are more usual after cows have recently eaten the bad silage, they can sometimes occur at a later date.
- **Consumption of mouldy silage** – eating mouldy silage or hay can cause fungal diseases such as *Aspergillus fumigatus* or *Mortierella wolfii,* which can trigger abortions. A fatal fungal pneumonia can follow after a *Mortierella* abortion.

Essentially, any illness a cow gets while she is pregnant could potentially cause a slip, making it quite difficult to identify what the reason was.

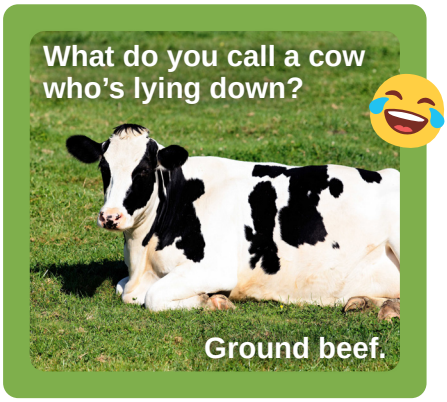
If you'd like to investigate, samples that can help your vet determine the cause of an abortion are:

- The whole aborted foetus,
- The placenta,
- Blood from the cow.

Lab testing may not always be able to discover the cause of an abortion. Sometimes the material has already decomposed, and having positive antibodies for diseases like Bovine Viral Diarrhoea doesn't necessarily mean it caused the abortion.

However, if you'd like to give testing a go to try and find out the reason, make sure you keep the foetus and placenta cool until you can get it to us.

If you think you're having too many slips, talk to your vet.



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