



Welcome to our Winter Newsletter of 2026!

Spring Check List!

To help you prepare, we've attached our Spring Calving Checklist covering many of the key products commonly used on dairy farms during calving and early lactation. If you'd like to place an order, please phone ahead and we'll have it picked, packed, and ready for collection, helping you save time during the busy season.

Calving Gear

- Ropes, chains
- Handles
- Disinfectants
- Lubricant
- Gloves
- Penicillin
- Oxytocin



Bulk

- Molasses
- Calcium
- Salt
- Drench (Eprinex/Dectomax/Turbo)
- Teatspray
- Udder Cream
- Hoof Gear



Metabolics

- Calcium
- Magnesium
- Oral Treatments
- Ketol
- MPG
- Starter Drench
- Rumenox



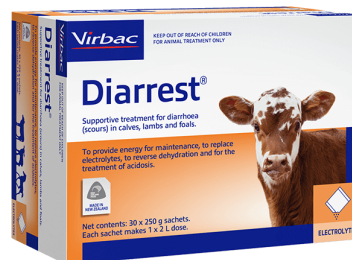
Calves

- Iodine Spray
- Electrolytes
- Tags
- Feeders
- Shed Disinfectant
- Teats



Mastitis

- Intramammary treatments
- Injectables





Metabolics

The Waikato pasture at this time of year is generally low in **calcium and magnesium**, high in potassium and high in DCAD. Unfortunately, this is a recipe for causing low calcium levels in the cow and coincides with when she has a sudden need for more calcium at calving and beginning lactation!

There has over the last few years, been a bit of a shift in advice for preventing milk fever. Some new interventions need careful analysis of the diet to avoid making things worse, but there are some core strategies that should and can be implemented:

Magnesium supplementation is still the pivotal point for helping the cow to mobilize and absorb calcium. Paddocks of dry cows should be dusted with magnesium oxide from a month before calving. Magnesium Chloride can also be added to the water, but this can be quite bitter.

Reducing the dietary component of pasture will often help. Many farmers **supplement with hay or maize silage**. The latter is good from a DCAD perspective but is notoriously low in calcium, magnesium and phosphorous, so extra maize mix balancer may be required depending on the levels fed and to which physiological group of cows (dries, springers, colostrum, early lactation, late lactation).

Calcium supplementation straight after calving is always a good idea. This can be via limeflour dusted on the paddock or mixed in with supplements. Other options are a starter drench, or a calcium bolus (Transition) at calving.

Supplementing Calcium pre-calving is a bit more tricky, as this can make things worse. Gypsum is growing in popularity as it contains sulphate for DCAD effect. Only go down this route after consultation with an advisor / vet with nutritional analysis and dietary calculations.

DCAD salts; sulphates and chlorides will lower the pH of the cow, which will increase her ability to mobilize and utilize calcium at calving. However, it can be tricky to counteract the very high DCAD of the diet, and these salts should only go into cow for the 3 weeks before calving and no longer....

Low calcium levels will result in a cow unable to use her muscles:

- Unable to rise
- S-kinked neck
- Bloated rumen with dry faeces
- Struggling to breathe
- Death

Longer term impacts include reduced milk production and increased risk of endometritis with poorer reproductive outcomes.

Treatments are still centred around oral drenches if she can swallow, or a bag slowly in the vein or under the skin. Take care not to give these too fast!

Please, if you have any concerns, give us a ring.



Calf Scours

Last season we saw a LOT of calf scours, and the vast majority was caused **by rotavirus** and **cryptosporidia**. Antibiotics do not work on viruses and protozoa such as these two, so getting samples of the faeces is important for a correct diagnosis and treatment plan. We have antibody powders which can be added to the milk for treatment and prevention. **Vaccines** are also available for vaccinating the cow 3-12 weeks before calving to boost the protection in her colostrum.

Whatever the cause of the diarrhoea, getting extra fluids and electrolytes into calves is the thing that will make the most difference. Scouring calves tend to get wobbly with dehydration, electrolyte deficiency and acidosis, so ensure you are giving **extra feeds of electrolytes with sodium bicarbonate** in the ingredient list! Calves will often need 4 feeds a day instead of 2 to replace lost fluids.

The most important thing for prevention is **colostrum intake**, as this is chock full of energy and antibodies (immunoglobulins, Ig). The antibodies herein are absorbed by the calf's intestines for only the 1st 16 hours of life, which is a critical thing to know. If you are dealing with newborn calves, the 5 Qs will guide your colostrum management:

- **Quickly** – ensure the calf drinks colostrum in the 1st 16 hours. In bad weather when the calf may not suckle well, this may mean collecting the calves quicker.
- **Quantity** – 10% of the calf's weight, generally 2-3L for the 1st feed
- **Quality** – the best colostrum is the 1st milk, and the quicker it is collected the more immunoglobulins it has. Using a brix refractometer means you can further prioritize the best stuff (>22) for the 1st feed.
- **sQueaky Clean** – bacteria and dirt will drop the IG levels. Ensure all equipment is clean, and colostrum is fed fresh, or stored chilled or with a keeper such as potassium sorbate.
- **Quantification** – blood testing calves at 1-5 days for total protein levels will assess amounts of good colostrum consumed. If multiple calves have low TP levels, a Failure of Passive Transfer is indicated, leaving them more prone to disease.

Recent studies in Germany have demonstrated a **long term benefit** from premium and extended colostrum management, in terms of less disease, better growth rates, better in-calf rates as heifers, and even on to better repro and milk production in the herd!

If you buy in calves, consider priority sourcing them from a farm that vaccinates or has excellent colostrum management practices.

Other causes of calf scours include:

- **Nutritional** (ensure calves are transitioned slowly from milk to milk powder, to different powders, or to different volumes / concentrations)
- **Salmonella** (this can be passed to people too, as can crypto, so wearing gloves and washing hands is vital. Young children and anyone with a weakened immune system should stay out of calf pens)
- **Coccidiosis** (generally seen when calves are outside, these parasites cause black – bloody clotty scours and "tail flagging"). Turbo Initial or a specific coccidia drench can be used for treatment, but many meals have a coccidiostat in the ingredients.
- **Worms** (generally seen after weaning, especially on paddocks which have a circulation of youngstock building up the parasite burden. Faecal egg counts should be used to guide when drenching is necessary, as over-drenching can lead to resistance as well as being an unnecessary cost and hassle. Simply drop off several faecal samples at the clinic for a quick result. We recommend oral drenches initially for best efficacy, but do NOT give this via the milk as we have seen multiple deaths by poisoning this way, as the dose is inaccurate and it goes into the wrong stomach).

Salmonella

Vet Kelly can "feel it in her bones that this could be a bad winter for Salmonella"! It is certainly a disease on the increase, with various emerging strains including Typhimurium, Brandenburg, Give and Bovismorbificans.

Last year across NZ there were multiple cases of abortion from this infection. We have also seen the classic sudden onset profuse diarrhoea with death of individual cases. Other herds have even seen outbreaks affecting many animals with sickness and milk drop. Calves can get it too, and most importantly it can be passed to people. It is vital to practice good hygiene (gloves, hand-washing etc.) when dealing with animals, particularly sick animals, and especially for zoonoses such as Salmonella.

It is transmitted by the faecal-oral route; contamination of pasture / feed.

Whilst wildlife can carry and spread it, carrier cows will produce the most contamination. It is most common in wet periods / areas.

Prevention is better than cure, and Salvexin vaccine is available again.



Mastitis

An outbreak of mastitis or high cell count can be pretty frustrating.

We are here to help, but a few general thoughts for July are:

- Make sure colostrum cows are stripped and checked for mastitis
- Teat spray is your friend!
- RMT cows before they go into milk supply. If positive, hold them back for a few days and re-check
- Milk cultures are always useful. No growth – antibiotics are not needed. Bacteria identified – will guide best treatment and where to focus for prevention
- Ensure cows are marked BEFORE treatment.

We can run overnight cultures in the clinic, but the mastatest system is a good on farm machine which also emails your vet. Either way, it is really important that milk samples are taken clean, or we are just culturing dirt! This will lead to unnecessary treatment and cost.

- Label pottle with cow id, date etc.
- Clean the teat with teat wipes thoroughly
- Strip x 2 onto floor.
- Strip milk into clean pottle held away at 45 degrees
- Replace lid without touching inside
- Refrigerate



Diagnostic Stewardship

This follows the concept that inappropriate culturing, poor sampling technique and poor test interpretation were driving antibiotic mis-use through the inappropriate treatment of normal flora and contaminants. For example, wound cultures have been found to be poorly predictive of infection and the decision to treat should be a clinical one, not culture.

Why is this important / relevant to farm medicine? Because we are seeing a (very welcome) explosion in cow-side diagnostics, and health data from wearable tech. It is wonderful to get these insights in real time, but we need to interpret them with care (just like using AI!). Is the data reliable and relevant?

Pre-analytic phase – **choosing the right test** for the right patient at the right time. A classic here is culturing the milk of an old cow with chronic sub-clinical mastitis. Staph aureus is grown, but is there any benefit to treating her? The cure rate

Cull Cow Transport



MPI Vets have been talking about cull cows and preparing them for transport. As an industry, we really need to ensure the cull cows' welfare is maintained, and a critical point is minimizing the risk of metabolics / recumbency during transport or lairage.

There are several recommendations for the whole chain of responsibility (farmers, stock agents, transport companies and vets), in line with the Welfare Codes and current research, including:

- Journeys should be as short as possible
- Ideally cows should be dried off for >7 days
- Lime flour (100g) or other calcium source should be supplemented within 12h of transport

will be low, and the cost-benefit negligible....

Analytical Phase = **good sampling** and test performance. Another issue I often see is contaminated milk samples. We may grow gram negative bacteria, but that was in the teat dirt, not the milk. Training staff on aseptic milk sampling is really important, no matter what test you are using. How many samples were taken? A herd wide problem should not be diagnosed from a single sample!

Post-analytic phase – **interpreting the results** correctly and taking the most appropriate action. How reliable is a PCR test for mastitis? The fragment of DNA may have been present from killed bacteria, and the cow may already be cured....context is king in this interpretation.

In short, history, clinical exams, good advice and critical thinking are still important.

Ischaemic teat Necrosis

Mostly seen in heifers, this is an emerging disease in the UK with a few cases reported in NZ.

The cause is so far unknown.

Various viruses and trauma can cause lesions of the teat barrels, but if you see large scabby areas on the teats of heifers, please contact your vet.



Calving

Let's hope you don't have many calving problems! But if you do remember the Golden Rules:

- Check a cow if she has been trying to calve for more than an hour
- Use good restraint
- Cleanliness is next to godliness – for both the cow and yourself! Have long gloves and clean warm water with soap and towel
- Use lots of lube!
- Many instances may just need a bit of careful traction, ensuring the calf is presented normally and not too big. Ropes should be appropriately and carefully attached.
- If you are trying for more than 20 minutes with no progress, stop and ask for help! Otherwise things will just get harder with a worse outcome.
- Check for a twin
- Give the cow some pain relief (e.g., Ketomax or Metacam) and calcium / energy
- I prescribe a muesli bar for the farmer (take orally)

Wearables and AI

Progress progresses on with an inevitability! We are seeing an explosion of wearable tech in the farming sector, giving enormous amounts of data. Heat detection, lameness, rumination, transition to milking, pasture cover, health alerts....

Shed devices can now assess lameness scores and milk quality.

So how do we utilize all of this on farm?

Certainly we are happy to be involved in the data analysis. Various programs allow us to access this data at a herd level to interpret when / what management changes may need to be initiated.

The other thing that is rather intriguing is the growth of Artificial Intelligence.

Some farmers are actually setting up a "digital twin" farm where they can experiment on the model and see what the results are before actually doing it in real life. Other farmers are using it as a tool to help with decision making, to refine plans, or to research a topic or problem quickly. Ultimately a lot of the farm tech will have an integrated AI component for analysis of meta data.

With current popular AI models, all sorts of data can be inputted for a wide range of advice. However, bear in mind that LLMs are still just predicting what the next word should be. This means they can be wrong or even hallucinate, but with the utmost authority!

Personally, I have been experimenting with AI, and it can be great as a quick internet search, or for generating images, but I have also seen it be plain wrong about things I have detailed knowledge about. Use them with critical analysis (is that really correct? Let's check...), and don't forget to use your trusted advisors.



Gossip



We are lucky enough to have the super capable and genuinely lovely locum Kelly Cunningham helping us all out over June and July.

Ag. Day Lambs

If you are getting an Ag Day Lamb this year it is important to be prepared! It is especially worth understanding about consistency of feeding and how to gradually increase milk volumes to avoid diarrhoea. Check out our handy guides on our website [Lifestyle Blocks - Cambridge Vets](#)



Race Night

Our Inaugural Cambridge Vets Farmers' Racenight was a great way to spend an evening socializing. It was well attended, well received, a lot of fun in a great venue, the food was splendid, the chat was chatty, the racing was exciting, and we are intending to repeat this in May 2027.

AGRICULTURAL TRAINING

- Operator competency on tractors, 4WD utilities and motorbikes.
- Health and safety - how to check a machine prior to use.
- Chainsaw and high-risk machinery operation.
- Machinery compliance - guiding farm operators to ensure equipment meets industry standards.

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