



# Smithton Veterinary Service Newsletter

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## UNDERSTANDING PREGNANCY TESTING

Accurate pregnancy testing done at the correct time can tell you if the cow is pregnant and when she is due to calve. But having an expected calving date is not the whole story. To use that information correctly you need to understand all the factors leading up to when that cow calves.

Firstly, if your cow identification and recording system is not perfect errors will occur. Cows without tags, double-up numbers and hard to read tags are common place on some farms. Poor recording (eg 345 instead of 354) and loss of records including lost tags also present big problems at drying off and calving time. If your numbering system is not perfect then NOW is the time to fix it – don't just leave it for another day.

The next consideration is the gestation length of the cow. Most experts agree on 282 days as the average cow's pregnancy but when you look at the figures there is quite a variation. InCalf figures show that:

- 86% of cows calve within 2 weeks of their due days.
- 9% of cows calve more than 2 weeks before their due date
- 5% of cows calve more than 2 weeks after their due date.

Lastly you need to consider when your pregnancy test was done in relation to your mating. If it was done early, that is at 12-14 weeks after mating start date and followed up 6 weeks after the bulls were removed then the due dates will be accurate given the natural variation in pregnancy length.

If, on the other hand, it is done late in the season when the cows are more than 4-5 months in calf then the due dates will be less accurate. The reason for this is simply one of individual growth and size. When the foetus is young and hasn't grown very big it is easier to feel and estimate size and therefore estimate how old it is. As the foetus grows this becomes much harder. It is the same with people. It is easier to guess the age of a young child than a 40 year old by the size of limbs, height and so on especially when you go on feel not sight as occurs in a bovine pregnancy test.

The point is that determining expected calving dates is never easy because it depends on so many other factors. However with good identification, good records and appropriate timing of your pregnancy test you can maximize all information gathered.

## FAREWELL AND WELCOME

Sadly, this month we farewell Amy from SVS. Amy is doing the fashionable thing and heading overseas for a couple of years on a working holiday. We're sure everyone has enjoyed working with Amy both for her ability and competence but also her happy personality. We wish her well on her adventure and will miss her. Hopefully we might see her back here one day.

Our new vet replacing Amy is Blair Summerville. Blair is a Queensland graduate and will be starting work mid February. He was raised on a dairy farm in SE Queensland and has always had the ambition to work in a dairy practice. Please make him as welcome as you do to all our new vets.

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## **SALMONELLA VACCINE**

Salmonella has continued to be an increasing problem in herds in our district. Every year new outbreaks occur on farms causing production losses due to cow and calf deaths, decreased milk production and treatment costs. Fortunately there is a very effective vaccine available, which protects against the major strains of Salmonella that affect cattle. Herds which have undertaken vaccination programs on their properties have been very successful in preventing the disease and hence the dramatic losses which can occur.

We intend to place a bulk order for vaccine in April. This aims to decrease the cost of vaccine to farmers.

If you are interested in protecting your herd or if you plan to continue with the vaccination program of your herd please contact us at the clinic to discuss the timing of vaccination and the number of doses required.

We are hoping to run a farmer information seminar on Salmonella early in the year and more details will follow in subsequent newsletters.

## **COUNTDOWN DOWNUNDER FARMER SHORT COURSE**

At this stage we are hoping to run another short course on mastitis and milk quality. We haven't been able to run a course for over 12 months due to funding issues. With a new round of FarmBis subsidies now available your cost is still only \$279 per farmer.

The tentative dates are mid May to early June. We are limited to 20 places so please phone to register your interest as soon as possible and further details will be advised as they become available. If you would like further information on the course and its contents feel free to contact us.

## **LAMENESS WORKSHOP**

We are seeking expressions of interest from farmers in attending a lameness workshop. Topics would include:

- foot anatomy;
- common foot conditions with their predisposing factors and prevention methods;
- tools of the trade and facilities;
- treatment methods including trimming/grinding;
- correct use of antibiotics; and
- application of wooden blocks.

The workshop would include actual hoof specimens and hopefully some on farm lame cows to work with. It is envisaged the workshop would run over 4-5 hours and cost approximately \$80 - \$100 per participant.

Lame cows are a very common problem on dairy farms with many farmers attempting their own treatments. Some do this very well and some not very well at all. Attendance at the workshop should allow you to approach lame cows with far more knowledge and confidence.

Please phone our office if you are interested so we can plan dates and so on.

## **TARGET HEIFER GROWTH RATES**

To see if your heifers are growing at the correct rate firstly work out your adult cow weight by averaging some of your chopper live weights. This becomes the average herd liveweight (AHL). Your heifers should grow at the following rate:

Target weaning weight	=	AHL x 0.2
Target 6 months weight	=	AHL x 0.3
Target mating weight	=	AHL x 0.6
Target end of summer weight	=	AHL x 0.75
Target calving weight	=	AHL x 0.95



