

SMITHTON VETERINARY SERVICE

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PESTIVIRUS/BVDV TESTING AND CONTROL

Since the BVDV information session we held in early July we have had a number of enquiries from farmers about the best way for them to approach the disease. As a quick reminder to you all, Smithton Veterinary Service has carried out over 400 individual animal antibody (Ab) tests in the last 10 months representing 30 or so dairy and beef properties in Circular Head.

What were the results?

- Ab's to the virus were detected on all properties
- Total Ab positive animals was 56%
- Total Ab positive cattle less than 2 years old was 42% (mob range 0-100%)
- Total positive cattle more than 2 years old was 80% (mob range 10-100%)

What this means?

- Ab's to Pestivirus are common in cattle in our area
- Many cattle less than 2 years old will be negative and therefore susceptible to the effects of the virus
- In some herds, many older cattle will also be negative and susceptible to the effects of the virus
- It is highly likely that Pestivirus is causing reproductive and production losses in your herd. In one local dairy herd, the virus has recently caused abortions.

Work coming out of NZ is showing that Pestivirus in that country is costing dairy farmers about \$35 per cow per year. There is **no** reason why the situation in Circular Head is going to be any different. An economic model has also been recently developed for beef farms that have the disease present and 'ticking over' in their cattle herd. The modelled production losses are about \$20 per breeding cow per year in this situation. With an effective vaccine now available at a fraction of these costs, we are recommending that all farmers consider control of this disease.

What do you need to do?

- **First** discuss the disease with a vet
- Do **not** just start vaccinating all cattle on your property
- One of our vets will develop a testing plan for antibodies in your cattle. In most herds this will mean that 20-30 animals will be blood tested at a cost of about \$12-\$15 per head. This small outlay can potentially save you a large amount of money if testing demonstrates that some age groups or mobs already have high levels of immunity to the virus and don't require vaccinating

- Once blood results are known, a vet will put together a longer term testing and control plan to suit your situation. In many cases this will include some on-going testing looking for cattle that are actively shedding the virus and acting as the source of infection on your property.

Pestivirus/BVDV is a very complex disease. You will not fully understand it without expert veterinary help. It is **essential** that you seek veterinary advice to maximise the cost benefit of a testing and control plan. If you are thinking of doing something about Pestivirus on your farm you need to talk to us **now** so blood testing can be finalised well before mating start. The reason for this is that vaccination (if required) should be completed before mating start. In previously unvaccinated herds, cattle will require 2 doses ideally 4-6 weeks apart with the second dose about 2-3 weeks before mating start date.

GRAINS2MILK

As many of you would know, a number of Grains2Milk farmer workshops have been run across Australia recently. Three of these have been held in Tasmania with the Smithton workshop attracting the largest number of participants of all the workshops so far. It is pleasing to see Circular Head farmers leading the way. An adviser workshop was held in Devonport on the 22nd July with Neil and Craig attending from Smithton Veterinary Service. It was very beneficial to hear the tips from Ron Storey who has a background in the grain industry and currently works for Australian Crop Forecasters. Some of the key points to come out of the adviser workshop were focused around buying and contracts:

- Quantity - forward plan by using feed budgets so you know how much bought in feed you will need to source. Determine what you can afford to pay. Avoid spot buying if possible.
- Quality – buy on quality by using feed test information. For example, avoid buying hay or silage on dollars per bale. It is better to purchase by the tonne dry matter and calculate how much you are paying or can afford to pay per megajoule of energy. If you don't know how to do this, seek help.
- Time – ensure you will have the purchased feed when you need it
- Place – ensure it is clear how much you are paying to have the feed **on farm** and that storage will minimise feed spoilage and hence wastage.
- Price – although price is very important, the points already listed above are priorities when purchasing feed.

The take home message was for dairy farmers to become price makers rather than price takers, to ensure contracts are filled out and signed and to understand the impact of feed wastage on the cost of feed. All dairy farmers will be receiving a Grains2Milk information pack on buying feed in the near future. Please feel free to speak to us if you have any questions.

INDUCED CALVES

Just a timely reminder to ensure weak, unviable premature calves are euthanased as soon as possible after birth. From an animal welfare perspective this is essential and there are no excuses for unreasonable delays. This means a designated person(s) should be checking for and destroying unviable calves at least 3 times daily during the calving season. Preferably calves should be shot and bled but if no-one has a gun licence, premature calves can be stunned with a blow to the forehead to fracture the skull, then bled.

RESPONSIBLE DRUG USAGE COURSE

SVS has now held the course for 2 groups of farmers. Feedback has been positive and we believe those who attended are now better informed of the safety, risks, emerging problems eg antibiotic resistance, welfare and residue issues that can arise from inappropriate use of veterinary medications. We will run these courses for as long as the interest is there. To register your interest please phone us and we will hold them when numbers are sufficient – cost will be \$50 + GST.

LAME COW WORKSHOP

We have now held five lame cow workshops and have almost enough interested farmers to run a sixth. Due to calving season we do not envisage organizing this until October but if you wish to register your interest in the meantime, please notify the clinic.

MILK QUALITY AWARDS

The 2008 Weekly Times Countdown Downunder milk quality awards have just been released. These awards recognise the lowest 5% of farms across Australia based on their annual average bulk milk cell count. A minimum of 9 months figures is required and the monthly average is used to calculate the annual BMCC – this figure is then ranked nationally.

Congratulations go to Geoff and Wendy Abblitt (second year running!), David Green, Shane Maxwell and family, Gerald Porteus and team (second year running), Leigh and Kelly Schuurings (reappearing on the list after a move to another farm with different cows!), Ian and Margaret Stanley (second year running) and James Littlejohn and Kirstie Fry.

What are the benefits of lower cell counts? Despite the obvious of achieving premium milk payments there are also benefits of improved milk production in lower cell count cows and reduced costs of clinical treatments. There are still \$ to be made in reducing BMCCs even further. Modelling using current figures shows that reducing the BMCC from 250000 to 150000 is worth \$70 per cow per year. A further reduction from 150000 to 90000 is worth another \$35 per cow per year. What this shows is that there are still financial benefits to be made by lowering cell counts further still, even though you may already be in premium brackets.

WORMS

Call it climate change or whatever you like but our mild autumn and winter to date has had implications on worm control. Circular Head has always presented an ideal climate for the survival of worm eggs and larvae. Because of this many of the manufacturers or field reps' recommendations need to be modified for CH. We don't get long dry summers or severe cold frosty winters so regular drenching is more necessary in our area. In years like this one, it has meant repeat dosing has been necessary at the minimum time intervals. This means approx every 4-5 weeks for the Ivermectin type drenches eg Noromectin, Virbamec, and 7-8 weeks for the newer generation products such as Dectomax and Eprinex. We always recommend strategic faecal testing for worm eggs in younger stock to improve decision making on the need for drenching while blood tests and recognition of clinical signs is often required in older animals. Remember, if you wait until your stock are showing signs of a worm burden, you have waited too long and will have suffered production losses.

SCOURING CALVES - CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS

Cryptosporidiosis caused by *Cryptosporidium parvum* is a commonly recognized cause of scouring in young calves under 3 weeks of age. In previous years we have not had a treatment for Cryptosporidiosis as antibiotics and anti-coccidial agents are not effective (this includes scour tablets, SD333 and preven). A new S4 drug, **Halocur**, is now available for confirmed cases of Cryptosporidiosis.

Cryptosporidiosis results from ingestion of the parasite from the environment. In the calf, it rapidly multiplies and is then spread in faeces to infect other calves.

Signs of Cryptosporidiosis may include reduced appetite, scouring and dehydration that are not responsive to conventional scour treatments. A laboratory diagnosis is required prior to prescribing Halocur. Samples can also identify other organisms which may be causing scours and reduced growth rates in your calves. If you think your calves may be infected with Cryptosporidia please call us to discuss your options.

BJD SCORE AND CALF PROGRAM

BJD or Bovine Johnes Disease is a debilitating and incurable disease of cattle, which is caused by bacteria that colonise the bowel. It is characterised by progressive weight loss, chronic diarrhoea and often swelling under the jaw. The cow usually has a normal appetite and other health signs. Generally clinical signs do not become apparent until cattle are at least 4 years of age.

BJD causes economic losses through the culling or death of cows with clinical Johnes and reduced milk production in clinically affected and sub clinically affected cows. Animals are infected for some time before showing clinical signs and may pass very high numbers of

bacteria in their faeces thereby contaminating the environment. The bacteria can survive for more than 12mths in the soil.

The dairy industry Australia wide has agreed on a national voluntary score known as the National Dairy BJD Assurance Score. This is designed to allow for the comparing of dairy herds with respect to their risk of having or spreading BJD. It assists farmers in buying or selling stock or seeking to improve the BJD assurance level of their herd. The scoring system (0–10) is based on a self-assessment program.

BJD is very common in dairy herds in south-east Australia, so many non-assessed Tasmania herds are likely to be infected. Initially non-assessed Tasmanian herds had a starting score of 3, but those herds that failed to implement an auditable calf-rearing program or test their herd before July 2008 have had their score dropped to 0.

If a calf rearing program was developed before July 2008 then that farm will remain a score 3 and it may attain a score 4 after four consecutive years of being on this program. If a farmer tests the herd and has a negative result the score will jump to 7. The score for infected herds can be improved by adopting the calf rearing program and undertaking approved test and control measures.

The calf-rearing program is based on rearing calves so they don't come into contact with potentially infected adult cattle.

There are three steps to the program:

1. Calves should be taken off the cow within 12 hours of birth
2. Management of the calf rearing area should ensure that no effluent from animals of susceptible species (eg older cattle) comes in contact with the calf
3. Calves up to 12 months of age should not be reared on pastures that have had any adult stock or stock that are known to carry BJD on them during the last 12 months.

The calf rearing program is an effective start to the process of decreasing BJD in a herd because: -

- BJD is spread mostly through contact with manure of infected animals
- Calves are most susceptible to becoming infected and the younger they are the more likely this is, and
- Once cattle reach 12 months of age they are usually more resistant to infection.

Further information can be obtained by: -

- Contacting Smithton Veterinary Service and picking up a National Johnes Disease Program leaflet and/or DVD
- Animal Health Australia – www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au
- Dairy Australia – www.dairyaustralia.com.au (search BJD)

ARE YOU READY FOR CALVING SEASON?

Yes it is that time of year again! Planning ahead at this busy time of year can help improve calving outcomes and significantly reduce stress. Following is a list of items that you might like to have on hand for the season.

Equipment:

- Calving chains or ropes
- Calving jack - This is not essential but if you have one ensure it is in good working order. Remember that calving jacks, while extremely valuable, must be used **only** when the calf is in the right position. This avoids damage to the calf and the cow's reproductive tract and pelvis.
- Obstetrical lubricant and rectal gloves
- Sterile milk sample collection tubes (and gloves)
- Needles and syringes
- Disinfectant (e.g. iodine to spray calves' navels, for calvings etc)
- Calf fluid feeder or bottle
- Pelvic lifter and/or cow jack for lifting down cows
- Lameness equipment
- NEW!! Cow rugs – great for down cows, we now have some in stock!

Medications:

- Letdown injection
- Pessaries
- 4 in 1 Milk Fever packs
- Mastitis treatment tubes - put sample bottles in the box to remind you to take and freeze samples of **all** clinical cases before their first treatment.
- Fresh or frozen colostrum (obtained from mature cows within the herd)
- Bovelyte Plus electrolyte replacer, the **only** electrolyte we recommend
- Calf scour tablets
- Udder oedema injection for heifers