

Buyer beware – when size alone isn't enough

Calf sales are a great opportunity to get off farm, to discuss the Highlander's latest win and to strengthen relationships with regular suppliers. But they can also be a great way to introduce disease, resistant parasites and a potential headache down the track.

Weaning is in full swing. For most this is the first time the cows have been in since calf marking. Replacement heifers are selected and steer calves along with surplus heifers, loaded onto a truck for the sale-yards or to a regular buyer. With beef prices like they are, calf sales are likely to be strong this year, which is good news for some when lamb prices have once again failed to deliver.

Much has been said about BVD in recent years and I hope now, with bull sales coming up, there isn't one of you that purchases a bull that hasn't tested negative for the disease. But how many of you ensure the calves you've just spent top dollar on are BVD free? Would you pay a premium just to know that the animals you're hoping to get big returns from in 12 months, can be finished at all? A case I was involved in 3 years ago highlighted this. A line of approximately 15 smaller crossbred calves were purchased from a weaner calf sale in April. In July I was called to examine the calves because 4 were sick and several had died since delivery. As a result of blood tests, three of the four sick calves were found to be persistently infected with BVD (PI's) and it appeared that this was mutating to Mucosal Disease, which is invariably fatal. Assuming that the other dead calves were also PI's, this farmer lost 6 of the 15 calves purchased to BVD, on top of any reduction in growth rates amongst the remaining calves. Fortunately there was no known ill effect to other stock, but the risk these calves would have had to pregnant stock, particularly in early gestation, is well documented.

This is just one example of the impact purchasing calves with unknown disease status can have. Whilst I'm sure the sale of calves with this proportion of infected animals is uncommon, you can bet on it there are calves sold at most sale yards every year that are BVD carriers (PI's). Diseases such as Leptospirosis and Theileria are others that can be carried and introduced to your property. These diseases can be more complicated to test for, but BVD is a one off simple test that can be done at any age.

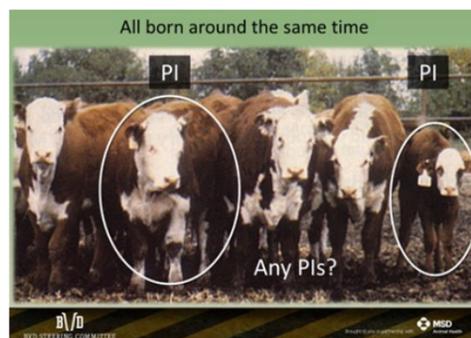
BVD aside, all cattle are far from equal; trace element status, parasite burdens and vaccination history muddy the waters considerably when it comes to

calf purchases. Is live weight alone an accurate measure of the worth of an animal? What is the true cost of buying calves with an unknown history? Do you read the box before purchasing a new TV or are you content simply with size?

The purpose of this article is simply to spark debate and remind you that now is a good time to reassess the biosecurity of your herd. Have a chat with your vet as you pick up the quarantine drench and clostridial vaccine, ask the question to your supplier of weaner calves and see what the neighbour thinks next time you see him or her over the fence. Ask yourself if you would be willing to pay a premium to know the status of calves you are buying. Alternatively talk to a farmer that has felt the full reproductive impact of a BVD outbreak come scanning time, I expect to be dealing with some soon.



Figure 1 There are two BVD PIs in this picture!



Andrew Cochrane BVSc



- 1. Situation comment, Puzzling prepuce!
- 2. Body condition Score - crucial
- 3. Did you body condition score your ewes at weaning or before mating?, Hard to chew
- 4. Buyer beware – when size alone isn't enough

Situation Comment

Warmer weather coupled with significant rainfall has ensured that it is a parasites paradise. Faecal egg counts have sky rocketed recently in lambs and lungworm burdens have been noted in mobs of calves. Ensure oral drench intervals are no longer than 4 weeks. Flystrike has also been a bit of an issue in some areas. Most sheep farmers should have had their rams palpated by now. If not please contact the clinic as there have been some positive cases of Brucellosis to date. There has also been some Salmonella Hindmarsh about as well. If you suspect this please contact your local clinic ASAP.

Not only has the pay out decreased for dairy farmers to unsustainable levels at current cost structures but the scanning results have been the worst as a whole since we first started scanning. Six week in calf rates are around 66% and final empty rates are averaging 14% (range 7-25%). In general conception rates have been the issue which have resulted from excessive weight loss in the spring. On the positive side feed levels and growth rates are pretty good in most areas. There are a few patches where clover root weevil is still having a negative effect.

Guess the Object...

An interesting case for the week. An observant owner reacted quickly when they noticed their young Labrador (there's a surprise) munch down a non-food item. Luckily due to their quick action we were able to expel the object the same way it went down! Did you guess... it was a battery?



Pet Reminders

- Worm cats and dogs
- Duck Dog WOF

Puzzling Prepuce!

Each year over the past few years we have seen two or three of these puzzling cases. Swollen sheaths in geldings of all sizes, over the summer months. The horses are generally well in themselves although some have been a little agitated about the issue. The swelling resolves but only slowly, some have responded faster with treatments while others have not. Blood test results, when taken, were normal. Hygiene and 'beans' were not an issue. While we have considered some possible contributors such as grasses, pollens, heat, exertion, injury, organ disease,



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it is best described as "idiopathic" meaning 'cause unknown'. While it always pays to get these double checked and to monitor them, the good news is, it doesn't seem to cause any harm.

NEVER GIVE UP!



Body condition score - crucial

We all know our target for cows is BCS 5.0 at calving (5.5 for heifers and first calvers) for proven benefits. When we don't reach it, it's usually lack of **TIME** not feed that is preventing them from getting there!

It is more efficient to target more early days in milk than it is to squeeze the last drop out at the end of the season so dry (some) cows off sooner and/or use once a day milking.

Note that:

- Supplements to milkers in autumn may not help as good milkers will partition it to milk not condition.
- Cows rarely gain more than 0.5 BCS in 30 days.
- Cows rarely gain BCS in the month before calving.
- Cows need time to adapt to winter crops before any condition gain is made.

Months before calving	BCS
4	Dry off Cows \leq 3.0 R3's \leq 3.5
3	Dry off Cows \leq 3.5 R3s \leq 4.0
2	Target R3 \geq 5.0 R2 \geq 5.5
Dry off day	Target cows 5.0 First calvers 5.5

We have several DairyNZ accredited Body Condition Scorers who can score your herd, or help identify cows to target.

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Horse Reminders

- Vaccinate foals for Tetanus & Strangles.

Graziers and Owners

Don't risk a dispute. Know the condition of the stock and the expectations from the start.

Condition score animals about a week after they have settled at the run off block.

We can do this for you - simply point us in the direction of the group. You will receive a report and any recommendations that are needed.

Take photos on arrival - especially if you have concerns, hind sight is a wonderful thing.

Repeat condition score after one month - to assess or prove that animals are gaining condition, and implement changes if needed.

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Cattle Reminders

- Pregnancy test
- Beef weaners - drench
- Review mastitis control - plan dry cow therapy and inductions
- Vaccinate for Salmonella
- Liver biopsy check for copper and selenium or check cull cow livers at work
- Lepto herd
- Drench cows at least 4 weeks pre dry off
- Dry off poorer condition cows and culls
- Lepto booster for calves

Dry Cow Decision Chart Internal Teat Sealant = ITS Dry Cow Antibiotic = DCT			Contagious mastitis risk (Staph. aureus)	
			LOW	HIGH
Environmental mastitis risk (Strep. uberis)	LOW	Not infected	ITS	DCT
		Infected	DCT	DCT
	HIGH	Not infected	ITS	DCT + ITS
		Infected	DCT + ITS	DCT + ITS

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Hard to chew



A line of two-tooth ewes were sorted recently into weight groups for preferential feeding prior to mating. An alarming proportion were lighter than expected; 120/400. The mouths were checked at this time revealing a concerning issue.

Of the 120 marked out as light, 30 had either only one central incisor, very twisted incisors, or very small worn down adult incisors with the pulp cavity exposed. A few also had lumps on their jaws.

The remainder of the ewes were examined showing another 30 affected ewes.

This farm has not noticed this issue before.

The two teeth had been wintered on fodder beet as hoggets and some 'baby teeth' loss was noted at this time.



A possible explanation?

1. Teeth loss prematurely as hoggets.

'Baby teeth' (in humans anyway) have a role to play in paving the way for adult teeth to erupt correctly. Without their guidance, permanent teeth could lose their way?

2. Phosphorus deficiency?

Fodder Beet is low in phosphorus. Anything that interferes with calcium or phosphorus ratios can also interfere with tooth and jaw development. Some of the development of permanent teeth will have been occurring during last winter. A consequence of phosphorus deficiency may be that teeth wear excessively, undershot jaws decreased bone density (holding the teeth), and other jaw abnormalities.

While, as with children, the teeth may straighten with time, it is likely that this damage is irreversible. As incisors are important tools for sheep eating grass, unfortunately this issue may continue to contribute to low body weight/condition, and subsequent reduced production.

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Deer Reminders

- Drench weaners
- Check copper & selenium status and treat if necessary
- Put chaser stags out

Did you body condition score your ewes at weaning or before mating?

While you could probably spot the difference in the picture below from the drafting gate, clients have been surprised at what they find when they actually put a hand on their stock. What you can see is only half of the picture especially if ewes have a good wool cover. Call us to find out more.



Picture: Lighter ewes drafted from one mob - spot the freeloader.



Sheep Reminders

- FEC ewe lambs
- Record mating data
- Check and change ram harnesses
- Foot conditions in rams
- Teasers out with hoggets

Duck Dog W.O.F



Duck shooting is rapidly approaching...bring in your shooting companion for their annual warrant of fitness this April and make sure they are in tip top shape for May. This includes a full physical exam and is a good chance to make sure your dog is up to date with worming and vaccinations, especially if going onto sheep and beef farms.



Every Duck Dog W.O.F booked in for April will go in the draw to win the cost of

their consult back. Ring the clinic now to book an appointment.