



MatamataVeterinaryServices

dairy newsletter

Autumn 2009 Issue

Daylight saving is over, signalling the fast approaching winter. Many farmers are drying off, while others are starting to think about 'change over'. Best wishes for the coming season and to those leaving the industry or moving out of the area, good luck for your new ventures.



From the Team at Matamata Vets



## On farm trends

Prolonged dry weather in March and April has forced many farmers to dry cows off earlier than preferred due to lack of grass and falling cow condition.

Facial eczema has been extremely bad on many farms. Many cows have not made it past their first acute contact with the disease and some will not make it past calving, as metabolic stress combined with a poorly functioning liver takes its toll. There is little that can be done once cows start showing symptoms as liver damage has already occurred. Blood tests can give an indication of the severity of liver damage and doses of vitamin B12 can help in the acute stages. Continued zinc supplementation is essential to prevent further damage.

Despite pasture cover being lower than target at the moment, there is much more supplementary feed available this year than last year. Most farms have a reasonable amount of supplement available for the winter/early spring. An amount of 500 kg/DM/Ha as supplements should be targeted, preferably as hay or silage which is able to be fed in the wetter months.



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## Spring Promo Evening

Thursday 25th June 7pm

Awesome deals, prize draws

Guest Speaker  
Cartoonist Tom Scott



# Farewell Vicki - The last hoorah



After nine seasons at MVS I decided to clean my boots of cow muck and focus on goat pebbles. I am not shifting and will be keeping my hand in (so to speak) veterinary work, but focusing more on the dairy goat industry. I enjoyed my nine seasons at MVS. I have seen veterinarians come and go from the dairy team and figured I would be here long enough to write off a couple of utes. But I was offered a new challenging position so decided to give it a go.

During my time with MVS, I developed a strong clientele base that I will miss. I have worked closely with many farmers, developing a strong herd health prevention program, improving overall animal health and increasing production. I am happy to be leaving on a high note and I would like to share a success story with you.

About three seasons ago I went on to Alan and Sharon Osborne's farm to help improve overall animal health and body condition scores (BCS) on a 215 large Friesian/Holstein herd. The herd was in two mobs - a low body condition dry mob averaging about 3.5 BCS and a milking mob averaging just above 4.0 BCS. We worked very closely on improving grass management, supplement feeding, mineral management,

reproduction and replacement management. At the time of writing this, Alan and Sharon were still milking twice daily and the cows averaged approximately 4.5 BCS.

Three seasons ago, the Osborne's highest production was 68,000 total MS. This season they will average a bit over 400 kgMS/cow and were on their way to a record season. Their empty rate has dropped from 19-20% several years ago to 3.2% and the majority of veterinary cost is preventative medicine. Alan and Sharon usually have only one clinical case a season requiring veterinary intervention. The Osbornes are still focussing on keeping animals healthy, increasing production, minimising feed cost and raising two teenagers.

Once again, it has been a pleasure serving MVS clients. I am sure I will see you around town or maybe at a rugby game when the Chiefs are being schooled by the Hurricanes in May - I will be one of the many in the crowd supporting the 'Canes to their Super 14 victory.



Pictured above: A goat recovering from a cruciate surgery performed by Vicki.



## WINNERS AT MVS

Congratulations to Brenton and Tracey Park, and John and Helena Schuler who won the Zinpro Availa Cu fishing trip. Keep an eye on the retail side for more upcoming promotions.



## Facial Eczema

As all farmers will be aware, MVS has recently seen a large number of FE cases. Spore counts are extremely high this year with counts ranging over 800,000. Many farms are experiencing significant levels of the disease despite having an excellent zinc dosing system in place.



This level of spore numbers has not been experienced in the Waikato for at least 10 to 15 years and despite good pasture growth and cover, GGT levels are still high in many cows. A combination of a dry January followed by moist warm conditions in February created conditions ideal for fungal multiplication and spore production.

Spores contain a toxin called sporidesmin that causes liver damage and as a result we see a subsequent decline in the health and production. Skin signs are due to the accumulation of 'chlorophyll' and 'bile pigments' in the blood stream, which react to sunlight in the animal's skin. These pigments accumulate as a result of liver damage.

This liver damage will cause metabolic problems in cows at springtime so farmers must be vigilant and proactive in planning to reduce this.

Comments were also floating around about the possible adverse effects of feeding palm kernel being associated with higher incidence of facial eczema. There is no evidence to support the assumption that PKE effects FE and essentially cases of FE are related simply to the intake of spores. Individual animals can be genetically more or less susceptible to the disease and this can add to the variability seen in the field.



Cows that were affected by facial eczema need special consideration going into calving. Discuss plans with your veterinarian.



## Trace mineral considerations following Facial Eczema (FE)

May is the month when we start our herd mineral testing visits. Generally the protocol doesn't differ from year to year, however conditions over recent months have thrown a few 'curve balls' that need to be considered at testing time.



**1. Accuracy of blood testing for copper**  
The prolonged and severe FE season has resulted in many cows suffering from the effects of clinical and subclinical eczema. These cows will still have elevated GGT levels at the time they are bled. Elevations in GGTs coincide with elevations in ferroxidase (the measurement for copper status in the blood). GGT is an inflammation occurring in the body i.e. liver damage. Therefore these cows give false elevated copper results. For that reason we strongly urge liver biopsies over blood testing for liver copper this season.

**2. Methods of copper supplementation**  
Another result of a prolonged FE season and the liver damage associated with it is the increased susceptibility of the liver to further insult. Copper injection has in the past proved to be detrimental to the health of the animal receiving the injections if still suffering from liver disease following FE. For this reason we recommend oral copper bullets over injections this year if copper deficiency is diagnosed.



**3. Susceptibility to metabolic disease**  
Cows that have suffered liver damage as a result of FE, are generally more susceptible to metabolic disease at calving. Farmers will need to be well prepared and vigilant in the planning and prevention of metabolic disease. We suggest farmers who have had higher incidence rates of metabolic disease in the past, check GGT levels of cows' blood samples to gauge further risk to metabolic disease at calving.

Please call the clinic if there are any further concerns or you wish to book tests

07 888 8197

# Pregnancy testing records

As pregnancy testing has nearly finished for the season, here is a quick update on some of the trends we have found with the results.

Overall in-calf rates were slightly worse than usual. Average empty rates are usually 7.5-8.0%, but this year were more like 9-11%. Much of this can be put down to poorer cow condition at calving, with many herds being a quarter to half a condition score lighter than usual. This was due to last autumn's drought and a lack of available supplementary feeds at the time of the drought. There were some exceptions to this though and we have had several cases of very low (<4%) empty rates.

Mating length was different on many farms this season. In summer 2008 the bull was left in for longer than usual due to the inflated price for cows at the time. This year many farmers have shortened their mating which has also impacted on the number of empties, so there may be more empty cows but fewer late cows than last season.

Empty rates in heifers (first lactation) were higher on many farms than usual. In many cases these animals were in smaller and in poorer condition than desirable, probably due to the effects of the drought on their body weight at 19-20 months of age.

Many farmers have been presenting us with a Fertility Focus Report. This is a one page pen portrait of all the things that can affect a herd's fertility and is available from Mina-Pro or LIC. This allows farmers to benchmark their performance in different areas against target figures. For example, you can compare your herd's 6 week in-calf rate, submission rates, return rate intervals and empty rates against industry targets. You can then immediately focus on areas where performance is not as good as it could be and drill down to the possible causes of this with the help of your vet.



We will be running focus groups for anyone interested or those who have had a poor reproductive performance this year.

## Farewell to Mark

Hi All, it has been a pleasure working with you all over the last season. However it is time for my wife and I to continue our journey north. We are relocating to Kumeu to become a couple of westies.



I have enjoyed my time in the MVS Dairy Team and wish everybody all the best for the upcoming season.

## New team member

After two farm veterinarians leaving, we are pleased to announce the arrival of Frazer Murray who will be joining the veterinary team.

Frazer has been working at Franklin Vet Services since graduating at the end of 2007 and has been developing his interest in farm and small animal practice.



## Nitrate poisoning

Over the last few months we have had several cases of nitrate poisoning in cows grazing on crops rather than grass. Crops such as chicory and turnips have been implicated as the cause of poisoning.

Nitrate poisoning occurs when nitrates in the soil are taken up by the plant but not converted to a safe form due to unfavourable weather conditions. Overcast weather conditions don't allow the plant to undergo photosynthesis and use the nitrate absorbed. It will also occur after an excessive amount of nitrogen fertilizer i.e. urea has been applied and not given enough time to be absorbed by the soil.

Hungry animals are more at risk as they tend to gorge themselves on the fodder and graze down into the stems where higher levels of nitrates accumulate.

Nitrate poisoning causes haemoglobin in the blood to convert to methemoglobin which can't carry sufficient oxygen for the animal to survive.

Typical signs of nitrate poisoning are increased breathing, staggy gait, weakness and the cow's gum colour will turn from pale pink to a muddy brown colour. Symptoms usually commence 1 to 2 hours after ingestion of the feed.

Treatment is successful if it is instigated quickly. It involves an intravenous dose of new methylene blue. Prompt recognition of the symptoms is required as animals will quickly die from lack of oxygen if left untreated. Unfortunately mild nitrate poisoning can often result in the death of the foetus and we will often hear of batch abortions about a week after grazing new grass.

When grazing pasture ensure animals aren't too hungry when they go onto the crop or new grass. Provide hay or silage before grazing and only graze the paddock for 2 hours. If you are unsure of the level of nitrate in your feed, bring in a sample and we can assess the level and likely risk to your herd.



## Animal health reminders

Lepto vaccinations

Trace element tests

Ensure any cows for induction are at optimum condition

Milking machine tests



## MVS Induction Criteria

Cows must:

Be between 6 and 12 weeks from their due date

Be between 3 and 8 years old

Have no history of facial eczema, metabolic problems, mastitis etc

Have a condition score >4.5

For further information on inductions or to obtain a reproductive planner please contact the clinic  
07 888 8197

**MVS Farm**

MatamataVeterinaryServices

## Upcoming Events

InCalf 'My Herd's Fertility' Group

Spring Promo Evening

Spring 1st Aid Seminar