

Sheep & Beef Talk

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A Case of Wobbly Calves

Recently, we saw an interesting case of wobbly calves, caused by an unexpected rare condition!

In a recent case study, seen in King Country, vets were called out to investigate a mob of beef calves that were showing neurological signs. The calves were between 4-6 months old and had previously appeared to be normal. All were growing well and were vaccinated against BVD and clostridial diseases with 5-in-1.

One of these calves was unable to walk, while others were a bit wobbly on their feet. On examination, the calves that could walk had a very stiff gait and stood with a wide stance. They were easily spooked by noise and seemed unaware of their surroundings. The calf that was unable to stand appeared blind with its head extended upwards in a "stargazing" posture.

Suspecting thiamine

deficiency, the calves were given B1 injections as treatment. However, due to the severity of the clinical signs the recumbent calf was euthanized and its brain taken for further testing. The whole brain was sent to the lab and the results were not what was expected! Instead of polioencephalomalacia caused by thiamine deficiency, the affected calf showed a degeneration of special brain cells called, Purkinje fibres, in the region of the brain called the cerebellum. Along with the history and described clinical signs the calf was diagnosed with cerebellar abiotrophy.

Cerebellar abiotrophy is an inherited disease of Angus cattle that causes neurological disease in calves 2-24 months old.

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A Case of Wobbly Calves (continued)

When affected, calves develop muscle tremors, have trouble walking and are very responsive to noise. As the disease becomes more severe they can collapse, begin paddling and develop a "star-gazing" posture. Sadly, once calves have got to this stage the only option is euthanasia. However if calves are only mildly affected they may recover, though they typically keep a staggering walk.

In this case one other calf died, while the rest made an almost full recovery. Blood samples were collected from surviving calves and sent away for progeny testing, which found that all affected calves were the offspring of one bull on the farm. This bull was then euthanized to prevent cases in further years.

Unfortunately, based on clinical signs it is very

difficult to differentiate cerebellar abiotrophy from ryegrass staggers or thiamine deficiency! Luckily, this is a fairly rare disease in New Zealand and very few cases have been seen. It does however, highlight the importance of sending samples to the lab for further testing, as without it, the bull may have sired more affected calves.

Know Your Risk for Facial Eczema

A cornerstone of managing facial eczema is knowing the risk on your own farm through pasture spore counting.

Last autumn was challenging due to the dry conditions, however on some farms in the Waipa and King Country, we also had stock affected with facial eczema which made things even worse. The result was fewer lambs scanned and more dry ewes.

A cornerstone of managing facial eczema is knowing the risk on your own farm through pasture spore counting. Spore counts will vary from farm to farm and paddock to paddock so you can't rely on the monitor farm results as providing the correct information for your farm. The graph shows

the spore counts during the 2015 season on three different paddocks on the same farm. Note the huge variation throughout the season and how different the counts are on 13/03 with paddock A at 20,000 but paddock C way up at 240,000! Imagine if your farm was paddock C but you were relying on Paddock A as the local monitor farm.

So what do you do?

When the regional monitor farm counts trend up to 20,000, its time to start collecting samples from your farm. Choose 3-4 paddocks across the farm

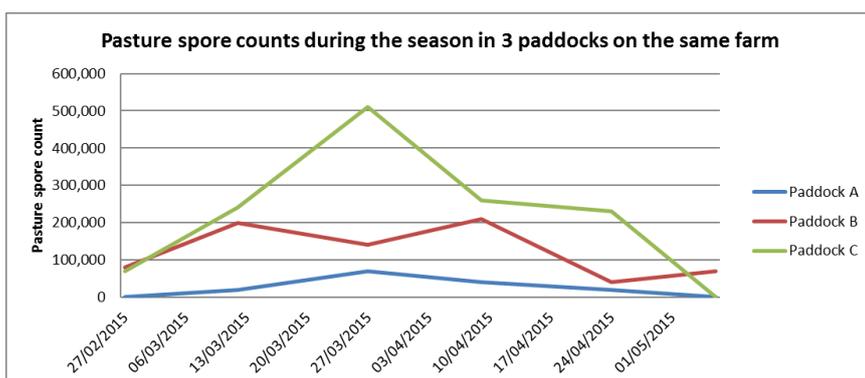
(similar to soil testing). Every week (until you start your management program), collect grass samples in each paddock by walking from one corner to the opposite corner and stopping multiple times to cut pasture at 2cm from the base. If your own farm spore counts start to trend up to 30,000, it is time to start your prevention programme. Your local VetEnt vet can help you develop a plan specific to your farm.

Why so many tests?

Because it is too variable within a farm to rely on just one paddock. Imagine yourself only testing paddock A above?

How can we help?

This season we are providing spore counting season passes. With a season pass you can submit as many grass samples as you like during the season for just \$150 excl. GST.



Meet the New VetEnt Te Kuiti Clinic Coordinator

In January, we said goodbye and farewell to Allana, our Te Kuiti clinic coordinator. Allana started with VetEnt 15 years ago on the front counter in King Street and wore a few different hats within the clinic while keeping us all in order. She will be missed and we wish her all the best for the future.

Every cloud has a silver lining and in this case, we

have welcomed Lyn Hobbs to the Te Kuiti team. Lyn lives in Otorohanga with her family. She has been a vet nurse (both small animals and equine) and farm animal technician for many years and comes to us after being the head vet nurse at Waikato Equine Veterinary Centre. Pop in and meet Lyn the next time you are in Te Kuiti!



It's Getting Dry out There!

The key to drought survival is maximising farm income in the following year. Controlling costs is important, but investing into things which will generate a proven return is vital.

- Be prepared! – have supplements ready and make sure water is available.
- Minimise the hit – make

early decisions to reduce the impact on future production.

- Monitor, monitor, monitor – feed levels, stock weight and BCS including “what ifs?”
 - What if it doesn't rain for the next 2 weeks? Compare results to the budget and be prepared to change the plan.
- Beware of the rain! – low grazing and warm, wet

conditions are ideal for worms, flies, facial eczema, liver fluke and many other diseases that can affect your stock.

- It is usually better economically to sell stock rather than buy feed.
- Sell stock that won't produce next year.

Reminders for February

- Keep an eye on our monitor farm spore count results at our website. Once the monitor counts trend up to 20,000 its time to start counting your own farm.
- Check your lamb drench is working if you are not doing a drench test this year. Collect 10 dung samples 10 days after drenching and bring them in to your local clinic.
- Order Toxovax and Campyvax if you haven't already. We need 3-4 weeks notice as Toxovax is made to order.
- Plan pre-tup animal health treatments to avoid yarding ewes close to tugging.
- Liver biopsy lambs to check B12 and selenium levels.
- 5-in-1 for weaned lambs.
- Give the ram team a spruce up before tugging – drench, dip, zinc capsule, trim feet.
- Book in cattle pregnancy scanning.
- Watch out for Pinkeye.