

# Sheep & Beef Talk

June 2020



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## Abortion in Beef Cattle

Investigating cases of abortion can be difficult due to the large number of possible causes but together with your vet, a plan can be created to reduce the risk.

A recent New Zealand study of abortion in beef cattle found that the average abortion rate from scanning to calving was 3% in cows and 5% in heifers. Wet/dries and cows, or heifers with calves at foot, were blood tested for BVD, Lepto (both Hardjo and Pomona strains) and Neospora. Recent exposure to one of these diseases was identified as the cause in 15% of abortions. As noted by the authors this is likely to be an under-estimate as only bloods from the cows or heifers was taken. To increase the chances of finding the cause of any abortion, testing of the foetus and afterbirth as well as blood is needed from a number of aborted cows. If a full range of samples is tested, a diagnosis is

made in about 50% of investigations.

There are a large number of potential causes of abortions including:

- Bacteria
- Viruses
- Parasites
- Fungi (usually through mouldy silage/hay)
- Genetic defects
- Access to macrocarpa, cypress or pine branches or needles
- Trace element deficiencies
- Nitrate poisoning

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## Reminders for June

- Ensure ewes are on a rising plane of nutrition while the rams are out.
- Make sure stock going on to fodderbeet have had their clostridial vaccine booster.
- Give Ewes iodine drench before starting on brassicas (if they haven't had Flexidine).
- Book in hind scanning.
- Book in your RVM consult if not up to date.
- Start thinking about your Prelamb Plan: balancing performance with a sustainable system.
- Remember the most effective time to knock-down lice is off-shears, talk to us about what products to use today!

## Abortion in Beef Cattle (continued)

timing between infection and abortion and the rate of abortions. It gets even harder where cattle are grazed extensively or in bush blocks. Often the only sign of an abortion issue can be a low calf marking percentage.

If you see abortions

occurring or have a poor calf marking result a thorough investigation, including lab testing, gives the best chance of finding the cause. Remember that even if we don't find the cause, we will have ruled out many common problems which is

also valuable information. Together with your vet, a plan can be created to reduce the risk of a repeat in the following year and/or collect further information to find the cause.



## How's Your Copper?

It is important to identify copper levels before significant seasonal changes to prevent any deficiencies.

With winter on its way it's the perfect time to consider copper levels and supplementation. Copper is needed for many processes in the animal body and deficiency can have a big impact on growth, production and reproduction.

There is a significant seasonal change in copper levels with animals having the lowest levels in late winter. For this reason it is important to identify levels before this and prevent any deficiencies. Because copper levels also vary a lot between animals it is important to take at least ten, but preferably fifteen samples. True deficiency will show up on a blood test, but to gain a better understanding of your levels, a sample from the liver - where copper is stored - is best. Liver coppers can be tested on cull cows through the abattoirs or by doing a

simple liver biopsy.

Once a need for supplementation has been established there are two main options to choose from:

Copper bullets - this is the most effective option as it provides long term slow release of copper. They come in a variety of sizes and are the preferred option, especially for younger stock.

Copper injection - this is given under the skin and lasts for around one to three months. Being injectable this is often the easier option, however precautions need to be taken when using copper injections:

- It is important that copper injections are not given within a month of mating as a temporary decrease in fertility has been proven after injection.

- Local reactions can occur at the site of injection and care should be taken to not inject into the muscle as this will result in a nasty reaction and possible copper poisoning which can kill cattle and sheep.
- Copper injections should be avoided in stressed/unwell animals or those with significant liver damage due to facial eczema.
- Do not give copper injections at the same time as administering any other products, especially drenches containing levamisole (e.g. Eclipse, Boss, Switch).

We are available for farm calls and over the phone during all levels of COVID-19 response to collect samples or to discuss your copper programme.

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