



farmVets

The Vet Centre

NEWSLETTER

January 2020

Autumn calvers – now's the time to think about trace element testing

As our autumn herds approach drying off, and the cows head into their final stages of pregnancy, it's important to ensure they have sufficient copper and selenium on board.

Copper is important for general health, milk production, fertility and calf viability. In late pregnancy, the calf creates a large copper demand on the pregnant cow. In addition, zinc supplementation for facial eczema can interfere with copper uptake at this time.

Doing liver biopsies is the best way to determine the copper status of your cows and calculate whether supplementation is necessary. These tests are quick and easy to perform and made as painless as possible for the cows. Around 6 – 8 samples per mob are needed.

Selenium is the other important trace element to consider. It improves animal health through the calving period and helps the cows return to cycling. Supplementation is highly variable farm to farm and is dependent on soil levels, fertiliser use, amongst other factors. The only way to be sure about the selenium status on your farm is to take some blood samples – just 4 – 5 per mob is adequate.

And let's not forget about our heifers coming home from grazing. Their trace element profiles can be very different to the cows at home, and it's important that we check their copper and selenium levels too.

Finally, a quick note about magnesium. Typically, magnesium levels aren't a problem during the autumn dry period due to the higher levels in the pasture at this time of year. But this mineral still plays a major part in transition feeding, from 4 weeks precalving through the calving period.

Speak to your vet about the right transition mix for your autumn herd. Happy dry-off to all you Autumn calvers, and remember, being proactive about trace element testing now will set you up well for calving.



It's almost the New Year: and a new facial eczema season is nearly upon us

Almost every farmer I've spoken to has commented on the amazing season it's been. A wonderful blend of warm and wet conditions has led to happy cows, and happy farmers! However, it's exactly these conditions that can make for a challenging facial eczema (FE) season. Warmth (especially at night) and moisture in the pasture allow fungal spores to thrive, and spore counts can jump up to dangerous levels in as little as 48 hours. These toxic spores cause significant liver damage to cows: slowing growth, limiting production, and in severe cases, leading to full blown liver failure.

It's important to remember that while some seasons are worse for Facial Eczema than others, there are always spores on the ground throughout the summer and autumn months. Even in better seasons, our vets will always see some cows showing facial eczema signs. This is because long-term exposure to low spore counts is just as damaging as short periods of high exposure.

None of us can accurately predict what kind of facial eczema season the coming months will bring, but every one of our farmers needs an effective zinc supplementation plan in place. Every cow, heifer and calf needs the right level of zinc in their bodies to protect them against facial eczema damage.

Speak to your vet about your herd's zinc supplementation plan now, so you are ready to start supplementing in early January: at least two weeks ahead of the at-risk period.

Iodine Teat Spray an interesting trial:

A Vet outside our practise wanted to see if iodine teat spray would increase a cow's serum iodine. The trial consisted of six randomly selected cows, three as non-treated control and three treated twice daily for one week at the recommended concentration.

Results: *Data supplied by Gribbles NZ*

Serum Iodine,

Pre treatment range 27 to 40 µg/L (mean µg/L)

Post treatment.

Control range 30 to 32 µg/L (mean 31 µg/L)

Treated range 60 to 84 µg/L (mean 68 µg/L)

This is obviously a small number of cows for a trial with no statistical analysis or peer review has been interpreted such.

With a level of iodine twice the control in all three cows, it would appear iodine applied as a teat spray most like does pass through the skin and significantly increases serum iodine.



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I'm about to start feeding my summer crops, what do I need to remember?

As with any forage crop underfeeding due to overestimation of intakes is the most common cause of poor performance. Just like 80% of New Zealanders think they are above average drivers; I know you all believe your turnip crop is 12 tonne/ha and your chicory is growing at 120kgDM/day every day! Underestimation of yield (not as much there as you thought) and underestimation of wastage (you think they've cleaned up better than they have) both contribute to this situation.

Animals take time to adjust to a new feed in their diet, sure most of the summer forages aren't as risky to the rumen as Fodder Beet, but you still need some time for the animals to get accustomed to the new routine and feed. Therefore simple steps like;

- ✓ Weaning out the supplement (over 3-5days) you are trying to replace while starting the crop
- ✓ Allowing or budgeting for high residuals or poor utilisation for the first few days
- ✓ Not changing everything at once (e.g. extending the round, starting the crop, removing the minerals all at once is a recipe for poor performance)

You need to take special care of the first lactation animals when you start a forage crop. Be aware of competition i.e. not getting to the face of the crop (long and thin breaks work best to allow every animal access), not acclimatising to the routine, not liking the new feed, not eating as fast as the mature cows and with bulb crops teething is a major issue i.e. will only eat the tops not the bulbs. All of these factors mean that heifers will often lose body condition score while on forage crops, that you will have to put back on in a couple of months' time.

Animal health issues

Chicory normally doesn't have too many health issues. However, we have seen nitrate poisoning in chicory when hungry cows grazed a chicory crop heavily infested with the red root weed, and if calves are grazing chicory then bloat is a potential concern if climatic conditions are right.

Photosensitivity (sunburn) can occur on bulb turnips and rape; the risks being stressed crops, rapid transitions, and too much in the diet (high percentage of their total daily intake is brassica).

If you use fodder beet for the lactating cows, I am sure you are aware of the potential animal health risks (acidosis) and mineral deficiencies (low calcium and phosphate). Teaching late lactation cows to eat fodder beet for the first time is extremely challenging, and it is recommended that they have eaten it previously (obviously heifers become an issue here). Training cows and heifers on a paddock of turnips first can work well.

Facial eczema - just because you are grazing a forage crop doesn't mean you can avoid normal facial eczema prevention strategies, as any amount of grass will have spores in the dead litter over the summer and 3-5kgDM of forage crop does not 'dilute the spore intake'.

Milk components will often change when grazing a forage crop, but this depends on what you are feeding, your milking frequency and of course composition of the rest of their diet.

Turnips and plantain are ideally fed after morning milking to reduce the risk of milk taint, but also the milk companies recommend you keep these crops to less than 1/3 of the total diet.

Calves do extremely well on either a mixed-pasture sward with chicory or plantain sown into it, or break fed on a crop of these herbs. Chicory or plantain boost the protein and energy content of the diet, which are both often lacking for the spring and autumn R1s when grazed on summer pasture. Ensure you allow (offer) 3.5-4% of body weight (in high quality feed) for the R1s at this time.

If you need any help optimising your summer forage crops from a cow perspective please have a chat to your vet.

ANIMAL WELFARE UPDATE:

Changes to minimum standards for off paddock facilities used for wintering cows

A heads up that from 31st October 2019 there have been some changes to the minimum standards for dairy cattle standing off paddock on hard surfaces. In everyday life cows will spend 10-12 hours lying down. During this time they relax their muscles, chew their cud (ruminate), digest their food and sleep. This is normal behaviour and is necessary for the wellbeing of the cow.

In the revised Dairy Cattle Code of Welfare, cows have a maximum daily time they are allowed to stand off paddock on hard surfaces to recognise their behavioural and physiological needs for lying down on a dry and compressible surface (not bare concrete or stones). This is covered in the code in section 5.4 "Off-Paddock Facilities". Off-Paddock Facilities are classed as calf sheds, stand-off areas or pads (including long-term or wintering pads) and feed pads.

Minimum Standard No 9 states: where dairy cattle are kept in off-paddock facilities for more than 16 hours a day for more than three consecutive days they must be provided with a well-drained lying area with a compressible soft surface or bedding that is maintained to avoid manure accumulation, and artificial or natural shelter or other means of minimising the effects of exposure to the weather.

In everyday farming life, this means that after 16 hours, cows standing off need to be provided with somewhere to lie down that has a dry compressible surface eg rubber, bark, or turned back out on the paddock for the remainder of the day. If you are calving cows on off-paddock facilities then the minimum standards state that they must have room to separate themselves, and to lie down on a dry compressible surface. If you would like to read the code, it is available on this link <http://bit.ly/dairy-codeofwelfare> and your veterinarian will be happy to answer any questions you have.