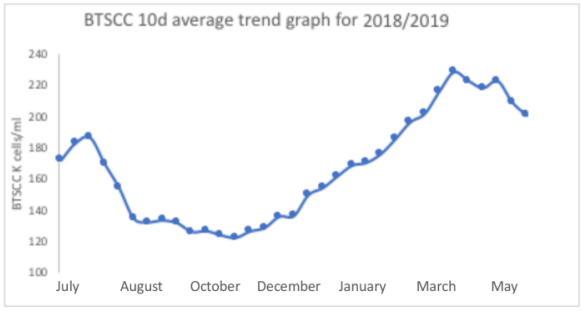
The Vet Centre
NEWSLETTER
October 2019

Making the most of your spring herd test from a milk quality perspective?

On average the bulk tank somatic cell count (BTSCC) trend for the business looks like this:



So right now you should be at your best BTSCC for the season. If your best BTSCC is not under 150,000cells/ml then we recommend taking action now. As you can see the trend is for BTSCC to climb in late lactation. If you supply one of the milk companies that pay a premium for lower SCC milk, this alone should be a motivator for action, but even for Fonterra suppliers keeping your BTSCC below 200,000 cells/ml in late lactation gives you loads more options (OAD milking, staggered dry off for BCS and different strategies with drying off antibiotics).

So what can you do now?

Determining who your enemy is in your herd is the best place to start. Collecting milk samples to culture from a decent number of high SCC (subclinical) cows will give us a great picture of what is going on in your herd. Some of the things we can find out from these milk cultures are;

- What is your mastitis caused by;
  - environmental bugs,
  - contagious bugs, or
  - some weird and nasty
- Where is the mastitis occurring in;
  - young cows,
  - old cows,
  - or some bought animals
- Whether your team is doing a good job of teat spraying – if not we will soon know by the types of bugs that we grow!

In conjunction with the milk cultures we can look at your herd test SCC data and assess whether;

- The dry cow therapy antibiotics have achieved target cure rates,
- The teat sealant (if you used it) has prevented new infections during the dry period at expected rates
- Whether you are getting too many new infections in the heifers (should be the cleanest cows in the herd).

For further advice on how you can make the most of your herd test, please talk with your Vet.

Calf Care

Most farms have now finished calving replacements. What happens to the remaining calves that are born?

Many of these will be transported off the farm, either to a private buyer, to the sale yards or to slaughter as bobbies. Young calves on a mainly milk diet are like human babies, they are 100% reliant on us, their care givers, to provide them with the necessities of life: food, water, shelter, ability to display normal behaviour, freedom from fear, distress, discomfort and disease. It is our responsibility to make sure they are fit for transport, and that the transport is appropriate for them. If we were sending our own young children out on a day trip, we would make sure they were fit to go, had enough to eat and drink, and also suitable clothes for the day. Calves are no different, so we need first to make sure they are healthy and strong. This means feeding them a full feed of milk within 2 hours of departing from the farm, and making sure they are not suffering from scours or other illness. Under current legislation they may have a journey of up to 24 hours before they legally have to be fed again. The sale yard and slaughterhouse holding areas are often cold and uncomfortable (concrete), so the calves need to have plenty of energy on board to withstand the conditions. Unlike our children, we cannot give the calves a snack box to open up halfway through the morning, so “a good breakfast” before departure is vital! Ask your buyer how far they will be travelling, and when they will be slaughtered/sold. There are often alternatives, which may mean a shorter journey with better outcomes for the calves. These calves are a dairy farm by-product, but they are our responsibility. Apply the “Human Baby Test” if you would not do it to your own baby, then you should not do it to a baby calf!

Free Coccidios Testing of Calves

Coccidiosis can be easily missed as a common cause of disease and significant reduction in calf performance.

Once clinical symptoms of straining and blood in faeces appears most of losses have already occurred resulting in contamination of the calf-rearing environment. The excrete oocysle are extremely hardy and difficult to kill with most Chemical disinfecting agents.

Testing coccidia (5 faeces sample) roughly 3 weeks after exposure to infected pasture but before appearance of symptoms, will give a good idea of subclinical disease and whether treatment is justified.

Treatment with Baycox C (coddiocide) not only removes established infection but also protects from further re-infection for up to 9 days, this allows the calf time to mount a significant antibody response to protect calves well past the high-risk weaning period.

Sampling data from past years point to very low to no change of oocyst excretion in all calf age groups where coccidiostat products have been used in calf meal.

We have a limited number of Gribbles vouchers to help monitor and identify the infective levels on individual properties. If you have some concerns around coccidiosis or just interested please call us to see what fits your situation.

"If you don't want do anything premating at least put your tail paint on… please"

I can hear you say "Why would I want to waste my time painting the herd five weeks before mating start date (MSD) when I don't want to use hormonal intervention?". But just because you can't see the non-cyclers doesn't mean you don't have any, and doesn't mean they will all disappear.

Having a large number of non-cycling cows is one of the biggest contributors to a herd's poor reproductive performance. A cow that hasn't cycled before MSD will be less likely to submit in the first 3 weeks, less likely to conceive to AB, less likely to be in calf in 6 weeks and more likely to be empty. Therefore, we need to identify how many you have, in order to know if it's worth worrying about them.

We recommend that if 85% of whole herd (including late calvers) has cycled before MSD then the herd is on track to achieve a 90% submission rate without any intervention.

The cow-level management factors that increase the risk of a cow not-cycling before MSD include:

- Calving less than 6 weeks before MSD
- Undergrown first calvers at calving
- Mature cows in BCS under 5 at calving and first/second calvers under 5.5
- Animals that have lost more than 1 BCS between calving and MSD
- Animals that have had animal health issues at calving, specifically uterine infections (endometritis)

Also see http://bit.ly/IncalfBooklet (page 147)

Therefore, by the time you read this article most of the above management factors have already being determined leaving minimal options for dealing with your non-cycling cows. Preferential feeding, separation and once-a-day milking may speed up the post-calving recovery and may reduce the anoestrous period, however if the cow is still a non-cycler at MSD then she will benefit from being treated with hormonal intervention. If you want to use OAD to help improve the pre-mating cycling rate in your herd then the strategy needs to be implemented from much earlier in the season, which is well before you know if you have a non-cycling problem! The use of strategic OAD-milking is a bigger farm systems decision, rather than a knee-jerk reaction to a non-cycler problem.

Non-cycler treatment programmes (e.g. CIDRs) are nine days in length and treating cows nine days before the MSD will give you the best return on investment. Cows starting treatment before MSD will calve, on average, 16 days earlier than untreated non-cyclers. In addition, extra AB calves are born the following year and treated cows are less likely to be non-cyclers the following season. I am well aware that sometimes the reason why you don't want to identify your non-cyclers before MSD is because there are too many of them! We do understand! But there are always options – the simplest being – if you have previously had to treat 30 non-cyclers at the end of the first round of mating, then put your tail paint on and treat them MSD-9d. Of course you may have 60 non-cyclers at this earlier time, but pick the 30 best animals and treat those. These animals are far better off being treated before PSM than being left until the end of week 3.

Don't stick your head in the sand this pre-mating period, get your pre-mating tail paint on and once you know how many non-cyclers you have, you can then decide if you need or want to take action.

Pre-mating trace element bloods

Six to eight weeks before the planned start of mating is a good time to look at trace element levels in your herd. This gives time to treat if necessary and ensure your herd has optimal levels before mating starts.

Copper and selenium levels are at their lowest pasture levels in late winter and spring, which is also when demand is most important for your herd. Copper, selenium and cobalt/B12 are the most important; low copper is directly linked to infertility, and low selenium is linked with retained fetal membranes, and poor immune system defences, which contribute to poor herd fertility.

Now is also a good time to check your magnesium supplementation is adequate. Sometimes we pick up sub-optimal magnesium levels, from the same blood sample. While low magnesium causes grass staggers, sub-optimal magnesium will cause may be causing a reduced milk production in your herd.

Don't forget about your R2 heifers, even if they are out at grazing. Low copper levels in youngstock reduces growth rates as well as fertility, making copper extra important. Younger animals also have higher demands for selenium. Slow release boluses are usually the easiest way to treat deficiencies in youngstock, and your vet can provide either plain copper boluses or multi-mineral boluses such as "All Trace". Get in touch with your Vet to discuss further.