



Simple and effective - RMT paddles

The Rapid Mastitis Test (RMT) paddle is very simple and has been around a long time, but it is still the easiest way to screen cows leaving the colostrum mob or mastitis mob before they enter the main milking herd. Once a cow is in the milking herd, if she has mastitis she is difficult to find. Therefore, ensuring that only 'clean' cows enter the milking herd will save you time later!



The RMT is a detergent that reacts with the cells in the milk to form a clump (slime-ball). Quarters that clump have a high Somatic Cell Count (SCC). Ensure that the person doing the RMTing is trained in their job and is taking a standardised approach to the task – the test is only as good as the operator!

Using the RMT paddle to screen cows at the end of their colostrum period, gives you confidence. Those cows are well on the way to recovering from their infection (less likely to relapse and also less likely to infect other cows).

If you find cows that are clumping there are different options depending on your farm's milk quality situation;

- Collect a milk sample and get it tested to see if there is a bug still there,
- Treat them (or continue treatment),

c) Mark them and leave them in the colostrum mob/ mastitis mob one more day and re-RMT them tomorrow,

d) Mark them and put them into supply; so they are easily identified/checked again in a few days.

Last Summer was not kind to our dairy heifers

Last summer was not kind to our dairy heifers and it's now obvious. Pregnant heifers are coming into the herd lighter than usual this year. This puts them at risk for calving problems, decreased milk production, and poor reproduction.

Many of last year's R1 calves had a 2-3 month period of NO weight gain. Their body condition has caught up now, but some of them are still smaller than usual. Body weight is a combination of proper growth (size) and body condition (fat cover). Do you know if your young stock reached their targets?

Yes, last year was unusual. And yes, the grass growth is great right now. But farmers need to get used to preparing for the worst case scenario - because it's going to get more common with the unpredictable weather patterns of the future.

Be honest, do you actually have enough feed to keep your young stock at home? Or do you find yourself having to choose between fully feeding your milking herd or fully feeding the young stock?

Do you send your young stock to a grazer? Did they hit target weights? What plan do you have in place with your grazer if we have another summer like the past one? It's not ok to hold dairy grazing stock short on feed for a few months.

This topic can be stressful and emotive to discuss, especially when using a grazer or when you have a share-milker on the property. However, next time we have a terrible summer, you'll be happy that you have a plan.



Tail-end calves: Weak, meek or something to tweak?

“Why do I get so many sick calves in the second half of calving?”

I do exactly the same things as at the start but suddenly get outbreaks of diarrhoea.”

We often hear this and although each case is unique, there are many common factors at play here:

- **Less cows left to calve means more limited supply of first milking “gold” colostrum** for your new born calves. It is very likely that they do not receive enough antibodies from their first feeds of colostrum.

- **Hygiene in calf shed is deteriorating.** Bedding might have become damp to wet and there will be a build up of bacteria and viruses through accumulated calf excrement and other secretions.

Antibodies and therefore immunity are below optimal levels while infection pressure from the environment increases. This can be a recipe for disaster and disease can spread quickly.

To prevent this remember the three Qs of colostrum management:

- **QUANTITY:** Make sure every calf receives enough good quality colostrum in its first feeds: 10-15% of the calf’s live weight as a minimum.
- **QUICKLY:** We need to get colostrum into new born calves quickly, within the first 6-12 hours of life before the new born calf gut ‘closes’.
- **QUALITY:** Measure colostrum antibody levels with a BRIX refractometer; you can’t judge colostrum quality on colour or consistency. Only feed colostrum >22% BRIX to your new-borns.

NB. Because the abomasum (first stomach) capacity is only 1.5 to 2 litres we need to split feeds so each feed contains no more than 2L. For a 40kg Friesian calf this means 4 litres of colostrum (10% minimum) split into 2 feeds of 2 litres fed within the first 6-12 hours of life.

Measuring the quality of your colostrum will actually save you time and make you money in the long run. **You set the calf up to fight infection right from the start which means reduced disease severity, faster recovery and less losses.**

Think about the above for a second: You and your staff’s approach to colostrum management in calves might have consequences for their performance and therefore your profitability years down the track. Talk about hidden costs!

Calf vaccines checklist

- Clostridial disease (tetanus, blackleg etc.)
- Lepto
- Salmonella
- BVD
- Catarrh

Have a chat with your vet about which vaccinations they recommend for your young stock’s situation and book an appointment by phoning us at one of our clinics.

Take the pain out of disbudding calves this season

A number of independent trials have shown the more pain relief (local anaesthetic) and sedation (tranquilization) use when disbudding calves, the less impact on welfare and the negative effects on subsequent calf growth rates.

When disbudding using a hot iron on younger calves (4 to 6 weeks old) this results in easier and quicker bud removal contributing to a better calf welfare and cost outcome.

In larger mobs this will result in more than one disbudding episode, but the data suggests this slight inconvenience is over shadowed by performance benefits.



Reducing inflammation and pain

As in humans, cows and calves experience pain and inflammation and this natural inflammatory response kicks in much like ours when we are sick or injured. Sometimes the inflammation is obvious to see in the form of redness, swelling, tenderness, heat and loss of function all of which can result from an assisted calving.

Sometimes the inflammation is not so easy to see for example, when a calf scours the internal inflammation can become so painful that the calf ceases to drink milk.

This pain associated with inflammation puts even the most stoic individuals under pressure. As a result, these individuals will eat less therefore produce or grow less. What can make a big difference to this situation is using a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) which acts to reduce the inflammation and pain.

We all want to speed up the recovery process to get every individual in tip top shape. A farmer that uses a NSAID regular had the following comment.

“A cow in our herd gives us \$10 a day worth of milk. So it’s important to us that every cow is back grazing and in full production as quickly as possible.”

With this, many farmers are stocking NSAIDs in their calving kits routinely because they can see how much faster the girls bounce back when we combat the pain, inflammation and fever.



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BVD testing calves-get it done early

Most of you will be aware of the BVD status of your herd, from Bulk Tank Monitoring but what about the young stock? How much do you know about them before they enter the milking herd?

Every year we find BVD PI (persistently infected) cows in milking herds; many of these animals could have been identified as calves if they had been tested at a younger age. PI animals can be identified and removed, stopping the spread of BVD to the next generation of calves (by removing the BVD positive animals before mating starts). Save time and money by testing your young stock early.

Calves can be tested for BVD by taking a tissue punch or ear notch (similar to DNA sampling). Disbudding is one of the earliest procedures carried out on replacement calves, so this is the ideal time to also do a BVD test to find any PIs. Even if they all test negative, the good news is that this gives them a lifetime result - once a calf tests as PI negative, she is always PI negative.

If it doesn't suit to do the ear notching at disbudding, for some reason, don't worry - the test can be done at any stage (e.g. vaccination), just talk to your local vet and make a plan that works best for you.

Metricheck early to get the benefits

Endometritis is relatively common infection of the uterus following calving. We often term cows with Endometritis 'Dirty Cows'. 'Dirty Cows' do not show any signs of being sick and they look like normal healthy cows. We can identify these by using a quick, cost effective and simple method called metrichecking.

As a rule, 'at risk cows' that have had retained foetal membranes (RFM), twins, milk fever, an assisted calving and/or a dead calf, are more likely to be 'dirty cows'. However, when whole herds are metrichecked, up to 71% of cows that were metricheck positive, were considered 'not at risk'. Research into prevention of Endometritis is ongoing. The whole herd prevalence of metricheck positive cows can vary greatly, with some herds only have a few positive cows and others having between 25 to 50% of the herd metricheck positive. In a recent study of 100 New Zealand herds, the average metricheck positive cow prevalence was reported to be 25%.

Endometritis results in lower conception and 6-week in calf rates, higher empty rates of up to 30% and if they do get pregnant it can take 2 to 3 weeks longer than cows without Endometritis. There is a positive return on investment to whole herd metrichecking when there are more than 2% of dirty cows treated, which is probably >95% of herds in New Zealand.

Traditionally we have metrichecked the whole herd in one visit around 35 days before the start of mating, to give the treated cows' time to cure before mating starts. A recent New Zealand study looked at metrichecking in batches starting two to four weeks following calving. This resulted in a 9.6% improvement in the 6-week in-calf-rate and a 3% higher 12-week in-calf-rate, compared to late treated cows i.e. cows treated a month prior to mating. So there are some real positive benefits for identifying and treating cows early. The most common treatment is with an intrauterine infusion of antibiotics that has a nil milk withholding. Talk to your Vet about your plan for metrichecking this year, there are some real positive reproductive benefits from identifying and treating 'dirty cows' early.

Our Farm Services include:

- Routine & Emergency medical and surgical care.
- Prompt response from our veterinarians
- Young stock programs
- Yearly Animal Health Plans
- Body condition scoring
- Trace element analysis
- Ultrasound pregnancy diagnosis
- Farm Staff Training - including calving, metabolic disease, mastitis, lameness and sick cow treatment
- Farmer support services including teat sealing, disbudding, metrichecking and metricuring
- On farm and in clinic treatment of pets and farm dogs



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Down cows - remember these facts?

Muscle damage in a down cow starts as early as 6 hours after going down. Move her from side to side if she is down for a while and provide her with some 'padding' underneath. The best would be to move her to a sheltered shed on a bed of hay/straw. Soil is actually quite solid! If it's not, its mud which means she'll get cold quickly.

Hypothermia (low core temperature) can have a significant impact. A down cow eats less, moves less and starts to struggle to maintain her core temperature, especially when it's wet and cold outside. When core temperature drops significantly, internal organs start shutting down. PREVENT THIS WITH A COW COVER! Make sure cow cover fits properly and will not restrain a cow when she is trying to rise. Ideally it should also be waterproof.



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