



Lilydale Clinic
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CATTLE

There are many things to consider when keeping livestock. The key to healthy animals is preventative care.

1. Vaccinations

Vaccination is a good way to prevent diseases. Cattle are most commonly vaccinated with "5 in 1" which contains vaccine against clostridial diseases (Tetanus, black leg, pulpy kidney disease, black disease and malignant oedema). All these diseases can be fatal which makes it important to protect against them.

The first vaccination should be given at 6 weeks of age for calves, and then again 4-6 weeks later. The basic doses of vaccination is followed by annual booster to ensure immunity against these diseases. Ideally the annual boosters should be given 4 weeks before calving. This is to ensure that new born calves get high levels of immunity through the colostrum (first milk).

2. Parasite control (drenching, worming)

Cattle get several types of parasites including intestinal worms and external parasites (parasites on skin). To ensure good health it is important to protect against these parasites. Cattle with severe worm burdens can show signs of diarrhoea, anorexia, ill-thrift and lethargy. Mild to moderate worm burden can also cause disease but it also puts stressors on their immune system making the animals more prone to other diseases.

There are several products on the market to use for parasite control, they differ in mode of action, how to administer them and what they protect against. If you need guidance in which product to use don't hesitate to give your veterinarian a call.

Another important aspect of parasite management include pasture management; many parasites thrive in manure which act as an "incubator" for many eggs. Paddocks that are continuously grazed by stock (in particular young stock) may contain a high burden of worms. Therefore it is important to implement *rotational grazing*. This is to enable you moving your cattle from one paddock to a spelled paddock every few months.

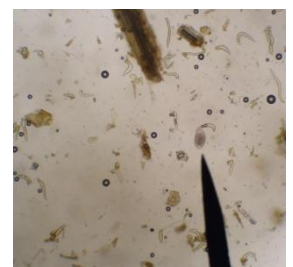
The best to know if your herd has worms is to perform a fecal egg count. Give your vet a few samples of manure and it will be examined for any presence of eggs. This is also a good way to ensure your drench product is effective against the worms in your herd, as worms can build up resistance to your drench.

Cattle should be drenched once a year as a minimum but it depends on your calving system. For hobby farmers with year round calving it is good to ensure your stock is drenched in summer (i.e February) so they are prepared for the wetter months to come. Bulls should be drenched before joining, and calves should be drenched at 4months of age and at weaning. If your stock is showing signs of ill-thrift, weight loss or diarrhoea contact your vet to perform a faecal egg count as drenching may be needed.

Other parasites we see are lice and ticks. Pour on products are available and many drenches or injectable products treat external parasites too. Ask your vet and they will set you up with a good treatment plan. It is recommended to rotate your products as well throughout the year to decrease the incidence of resistance.

For more information on parasite control in cattle, see:

www.vff.org.au/vff/Documents/Livestock%20Resources/Factsheet_Livestock_Internal%20Parasites%20of%20Cattle.pdf





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3. Feet

Cattle has continuous growing feet which may need attention throughout their life. Long feet can cause cracks, pain and lameness in cattle. Monitor your stock for any signs of pain but also inspect their feet on a regular basis. Their "claws" can grow long and start crossing over each other. Once this occurs it becomes difficult to walk and predisposes to other feet diseases.

Also monitor your stock's feet for cracks, lesions or swellings. Good foot health promotes good overall health. Poor feet health can lead to ill-thrift as stock will find walking difficult, they may not eat as much as they should and walking to water troughs becomes quite the task.



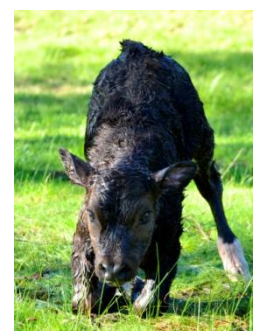
Most cattle need their feet trimmed, it is recommended to have their feet assessed annually and your vet can trim them accordingly. If you have any concerns about your stock's feet, don't hesitate to call your vet. Many farmers line up other health management tasks such as vaccinations, drenching with check up of the stock's feet.

4. Breeding

If you are running a breeding program there are a few things to remember. Healthy cows and bulls will thrive and produce good offspring. Ensure they are drenched and vaccinated accordingly. Health, nutrition and planning are key to a successful breeding programme.

The average pregnancy is 282 days. You can choose to have all year round calving, spring or autumn calving. Join the bull 6-9 weeks at the time.

- Perform bull Breeding Soundness Exams on the bulls 2 months before mating
- Allow younger bulls a few more weeks with the cows to gain more experience but also work up the strength to cover the cows
- Keep a good bull to cow ratio
 - o 1 fertile bull per 40 cows is optimal (2 per 80 cows etc)
 - o It is good to have one more experienced bull and one younger bull together
 - o Observe the bull weekly to monitor any signs of injury or lack of libido
- Try to keep the cows in optimal body condition:
 - o Cow to be 2.5-3.5 out of 5 when mated
- Evaluate records from previous years:
 - o Which bulls and which groups of cows had good breeding performance?
 - o This can help rule in and out certain individuals, especially the bulls
- Synchronize the cows to cycle before the bulls are introduced, if needed
- Pregnancy testing can be performed by your vet from 6-8 weeks of pregnancy. This helps to identify the empty ones, and give them another chance with the bull.





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Despite good preventative care there are a few common health problems or diseases we see on a regular basis.

1. Calving problems

It is important to monitor your cows close to calving to help deliver the calf is needed. Once you notice your cow is in labour the calf should ideally be delivered within 2 hours. If the cow is having trouble delivering please call your veterinarian. The sooner a vet is called out, the greater the chances are to deliver a healthy calf and keep the cow in good health. Once it has taken too long, there is a high risk of calf death and the cow becoming ill.

Common reasons for calving problems include small cows (such as first time calvers) with large calves i.e. the bull is producing large offspring. Therefore, it is important to match your smaller animals with bulls producing small calves. Other common reasons include inappropriate body condition scores of the cows. Cows that are too fat can have troubles delivering a calf.

Once delivery is completed the cow may go into "milk fever", or calving paralysis. Both can occur after a difficult calving. Milk fever occurs when the dam produces high volumes of milk thus uses high proportions of calcium into the milk, making the calcium in her own blood too low. Signs include tremors, inability to walk, lying down and not being able to get up. This can be treated by your vet if started early enough.

Calving paralysis occurs when a cow has been calving for either a long time, or trying to deliver a large calf. The pressure of the calf causes nerve damage in the cow which can lead to different grades of lameness but also be so severe she is unable to rise. With time this can resolve, but physiotherapy, turning the cow over from side to side a few times per day is needed for good recovery. Prevention is better than cure; good breeding management but also to call a vet if any concerns during calving occurs.

More severe problems that can occur post calving includes uterine prolapse, bladder prolapse, mastitis and metritis. All of these can become life threatening emergencies so ensure you call your vet if you are concerned.



2. Diarrhoea/scouring

There can be number of causes of diarrhoea. In adult cattle it is most commonly due to feed intake, intestinal parasites or bacterial diseases. To best diagnose the cause of the diarrhoea it is good to contact your vet. All causes of diarrhoea required different types of treatment. Cattle can lose condition very quickly, sometimes in a day or two. Therefore it is usually better to get on top of treatment early rather than later. Once the cow has lost condition and become dehydrated the prognosis becomes much graver.

In calves we often see scours due to viral, bacterial or parasitic causes. Calves will lose condition very rapidly once diarrhoea has started and dehydration quickly becomes life threatening. Most often, diarrhoea in calves comes from the environment where hygiene hasn't been ideal and where the calf hasn't had a good drink of colostrum. Keep cows due to calve separate from the herd in a smaller paddock, that has ideally been spelled for a couple of months, and try to keep it clean from manure by mucking it daily. If you are using calving boxes ensure these are cleaned out daily. If any calves are starting to show signs of scouring, separate them from the other calves to reduce the risk of transmission. Call a vet as soon as possible to start supportive care and treatment. In some cases collecting faeces to be analysed by a lab is recommended.



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3. Pink Eye (Bovine contagious Keratoconjunctivitis)

Pink eye is a term for an eye infection spread by flies. This bacterial (*Moraxella bovis*) infection cause inflammation of the eye, increased discharge from the eye, swelling and pain. This can lead to ill-thrift and subsequently loss of production. It is contagious and can quickly be spread among the herd. It is commonly seen in the summer months when it is dry and dusty. If you notice that your herd has problems with their eyes it is recommended to call a vet for an examination. There is treatment available but this can become costly, especially if you need to treat many of your cattle. Prevention can be done by reducing fly burden (fly traps, keep paddocks clean from manure) early detection and avoid yarding during dusty periods. There is also a vaccination on the market which can be more beneficial to you. Talk to your veterinarian about options for this.



4. Lameness

There are several reasons for cattle to become lame. The number one prevention is good foot health including keeping them trimmed. Wet, muddy environments can lead to abscesses, foot rot and cracks. As most cattle diseases, prevention is better than cure. Try to keep them dry and clean, rotate between paddocks to avoid the really muddy ones during heavy rain. Monitor and early detection is also important. Abscesses and foot rot require medical treatment, so if you are concerned give your vet a call. Poor feet health lead to loss of production and ill thrift which can in turn cost you financial losses.



For any concerns or if you need help with preventative health care, don't hesitate to contact us on (03) 9739 5244.

Dr Andrea Hertzberg BVSc

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