

Achieving Value From Your Vet

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Communication

The key to getting the best value from your vet is **good communication**. No two farms are the same. If your vet knows your goals, and your philosophies on farming and life, there is a much greater chance of both you, the farmer, and the vet having a satisfying, professional relationship. If this is the case, you will get the **best value from your vet**.

Would you give a cow a chance even if the odds were against her? Or would you prefer to be told perhaps the most economical option is to put her down? There is no right answer, but there is a right answer for your farm. Whenever possible be present when the vet is attending to your animal to make sure the correct decisions are made.

The vet visits many farmers and you have to make the effort to ask the questions to get the answers to make the right decision. It is not for the vet to make the decision; they need to give you the information for you to make the decision.

For an individual animal all vets are very similar and will give you similar information. On herd health you can take time to make a decision so feel free to ask for other opinions within a vet practice. I encourage all my younger vets to discuss their cases with me and also hope my farmers feel they are welcome to ring for advice. I try to instill in new vets that they cannot get experience overnight, so for herd issues they do need to discuss these things. Even those of us that have been vets for years discuss cases to try and look at all options. Often you, the farmer, come up with the answers. We throw ideas out there and you come up with how to implement them. Animal health on your farm should be a team approach with your vet. To achieve this both the vet and the farmer have to communicate well.

Taking the opportunity to give your vet a cuppa is probably the best value thing you could ever give away. Over a cuppa you both take the opportunity to learn more.

The time spent bargaining on the price of a product should be spent deciding if it is the **right product** being used at the **right time** and in the **right way**.

Education and knowledge can save you money

Vets often give educational talks. But every time you have contact with your vet take the time to learn from them. Vets are very free with their advice, so use all these opportunities. Simple things like working out the appropriate time to do something can give you better results. You will spend the same amount of money, but you get more value for your dollar.

Information - collecting data is often free and can then help you make more informed decisions

The more information you have, the better decisions you and your vet can make. Most people record cow treatments, but do you put it in MINDA? Do you weigh your calves? Do you record cows at risk? Non-cyclers before mating? Collecting other data can have a cost,

but better decisions can be made with herd test data, copper and selenium levels, BVD tests etc.

Examples where value can be gained

Dry cow

Research has shown a decrease in mastitis just by having a team of technicians doing the dry cow treatment rather than the farmer. Correct hygiene at the time of dry cow application costs nothing but will give improved results. You, the farmer, can achieve this, you don't have to be a technician, you just have to change the way you have done things for years. Everyone can achieve ideal hygiene.

What dry cow should I use?

Long acting, short acting, teat sealant? To get the best answer for this we need somatic cell data, numbers of clinical cases, timing of cases, winter grazing conditions, production at drying off and your **philosophies**.

Should you use a teat sealant on your heifers?

- No, if you are selling colostrum from heifers.
- Yes, if you get over 10% mastitis in heifers in the spring.
- No, if you get less than 5% mastitis in your heifers in the spring. But you might be someone that wants to try to achieve 0% mastitis, so then even if you don't get much mastitis you might choose to use a teat sealant. **Communication - what is your philosophy?**
- No, if you don't have the facilities or staff to do it. But if you really want to do it you will find a way. Facilities are used as an excuse rather than a real reason not to do something.

Will dry cow policies change in the future?

Yes, whole herd dry cow protocols will probably become a thing of the past as more pressure comes on to reduce the use of antibiotics. Whole herd dry cow is easy, no data needed, no decisions on each cow, less stress on cows as reduction in food intake does not need to be as severe, no need to bring cows back in to check for mastitis.

If not using whole herd treatment you have to collect more data and look at dry cow treatment differently. If using a teat sealant you need very good SCC data close to dry off day, well-marked cows (who gets what). If giving some cows no treatment you have to manage your feed allocations differently, as dripping cows are very vulnerable to mastitis.

Drenching

Drench form (pour-on, oral, injection), active (mectin (MLs), benzimidazole, levamisole, combination) and timing can make all the difference to the response. For example, Genesis Ultra treats all stages of liver fluke, roundworms and sucking lice, but has a long withholding period, so needs to be given at drying off. This is too early for the best kill of the liver fluke population and it is not the ideal time for *Ostertagia* and it is the wrong time for lice, but farmers like it as it is convenient. But do they really get the benefits they think they are getting?

Calves

Abamectin pour-ons should not be used on calves until they are over 150 kg. Every couple of years we get someone who has a few calves die by over drenching with these products. When calves are young it is easy to overdose the smallest in the group. If you have variability you should separate them into two groups to dose both at more appropriate weights. Using (at a minimum) a weigh tape to check their weight if you don't have scales. I recommend oral drenches for calves as they do a good job. It is an easy way to save money compared to using pour-ons.

Drench calves regularly rather than waiting until they look like they require a drench. By then their growth rate is slowed and it is difficult to make up that lost growth. Heifers are required to calve at 22-24 months of age. They need every opportunity to achieve their target weight. It is something most farms could improve on.

Cows

Do adult cows need drenching? In our area farms close to the sea need a minimum of something to kill adult liver fluke once a year. Our clients further inland, who get more frosts, often have no liver fluke issues so might not need to drench their adult cows. Again, every farm is different. We get bulk milk *Ostertagia* and liver fluke levels taken on all our member clients, so this helps in the decision making. Again, all farms are different. Are you prepared to orally drench your cows? Have you got the facilities? What worms are you targeting on your farm? **Communication and information are needed to help make a good decision.**

Pregnancy testing

What information do you want?

Timing when you do pregnancy testing is really important in relationship to what information you require. The earlier you test the more information you get, but you miss cows that slip later in the season. All pregnancy testing is most accurate at 5-11 weeks pregnant. So saying you want to test in April to date all the pregnancies is just not an option.

Looking at some costs

\$870 to test 300 cows, \$174 to test rechecks (cows less than 6 weeks pregnant at first test, 60 cows) or \$870 to check them all again.

What is the price to carry a cow for the winter who turns up empty? It is very easy to cover the costs of the pregnancy testing, and if more than 1 cow is found you save money. On average we find 1-2 % extra empties if we recheck all the cows in April. The farmer normally knows about 1 % and we find 1 %.

Minerals

Why do farmers buy whatever walks up the driveway because they say some trial showed an increase in production or decrease in lameness? Nothing in a bottle solves lame cows. If it did we would all be using it. Vit G is the best vitamin you can give your cows. If you underfeed your cows we never say they lack in feed, we say instead they lack in minerals. The same as people. **What is said about all supplements? "They do not replace a balanced diet".**

In our area we are deficient in selenium and copper. Selenium is low in much of New Zealand. We find, with our high rainfall, that if you are using selenium prills you need to apply them twice a year. I recommend late autumn to make sure levels are still high for calving and a second application in spring.

Palm kernel has created cows with high copper levels, rather than low, so you need to make sure you are not giving any other mineral supplement with high copper levels if feeding PKE.

What value can I get from a vet body condition scoring my cows?

More than the vet telling you, the herd is low in minerals. It is easier to tell someone they are low in minerals than their cows are too light. As vets having gone through the accreditation for body condition scoring it makes it easier to give an honest answer. Farmers need to get more active at achieving all cows with a condition score of 5.0 and first and second calvers with a 5.5 BCS at calving. Then, having less than 15 % of cows below 4 at mating. To achieve production and reproduction targets we have to concentrate on BCS. Having someone else come in several times a year to give you a second opinion on your cows' condition will help you concentrate on these targets.

Reproduction

Education and hitting body condition targets has more effect than treating non-cycling cows.

- Good heat detection, educate your staff.
- Achieving calving BCS targets.
- Bull power, often something well underestimated.
- Heifers achieving calving weight targets of 90 % of adult cow (this is different to BCS, a fat little heifer is also not ideal).
- Non-cycling cows – timing. Doing non-cycling cows well into mating makes no money. **Intervene early or not at all, again information needed. You need to know who your non-cylers are at the beginning of mating if you are to treat them early.**

Young stock

Healthy cows lead to healthy calves. Calves need 10 % of their body weight in colostrum in their first 6 hours of life to give them a good start.

Weigh young stock. Use MINDA Weights and be tough on yourself when calves are not up to target. You need to work on all animals being on target. If your calves' average is on target that means half your calves are below target and that is not ideal. Well-grown young stock lead to more first and second calvers making it through to third calvers, and becoming the moneymakers of your herd. If more of your stock make it through to third calvers you then have more opportunities to cull for reasons other than empties, leading to a better herd.

Mastitis

Teat spray and rubberware the two biggest reasons for mastitis problems. **Changing your mastitis treatment is probably not going to change things.** Only 12 % of farmers in a survey had correct teat spray coverage of teats and the correct teat spray dilution. Correct dilution and changing rubberware more often will cost more, but it is money well spent. Mastitis reduces production and reproduction, leading to unnecessary culls.

Animal health products and services

Will I get a return on a product?

Remember, all trials show you averages, and you are dealing with a living system. In trials there are variable results on different properties, so is your property one which will give a good return or an average return?

Do you have insurance? Sometimes the products you use are an insurance e.g. I have clients who continue to whole herd Cepravin, even though they have a low SCC and low mastitis, due to the fact that the Cepravin is a great insurance to make sure they stay that way. Vaccinations insure a greater chance you will not have a problem. Buying a product with more trials behind it is a greater insurance - it will do what it claims.

No one situation is the same.

Collect the data, good records are good value.

A good rapport with your vet is worth gold.