FranklinVets
DECEMBER 2025

UPDate

Happy Holidays!

DR MARK HOSKING
BVSc, MBA (dist.)
MANZCVS,
Chief Executive

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As we close in on the end of 2025, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our clients for their continued support over the last 12 months.

There will be no surprise that our farm business performance usually mirrors the financial performance of our clients, and so the year has been fairly positive for us compared to the last few. Farm returns are strong, and the increased value of animals is driving increased spending on preventive and treatment measures for animal health. However, like many businesses, the continued increase in our costs is proving challenging to keep up with. Things are still fairly tough for our companion animal business, which aligns with the rest of the economy and consumer confidence, and most of the country has seen a drop-off in demand for pet veterinary services over the last two years.

We continue to take a very long-term approach to our business, investing in our facilities, people, and equipment. This year, we have completed upgrades to our Paeroa and Kopu clinics, as well as a major expansion and upgrade of our Te Kauwhata clinic.

The Te Kauwhata upgrades coincide with our 20th anniversary of first starting veterinary services in the North Waikato in November 2005,

with initial services operating from Pukekohe, before the first location – a 5 x 3 metre portacom and a shipping container in the back of Carleys truck yard in June 2006.

The portacom remained the TK 'clinic' for 12 months while the current building was planned and built. The portacom had no aircon or insulation, and no kitchen or toilet facilities, and meetings with clients were held sitting on drums of drench. Luckily, Karen, our original customer service representative, was very accepting of our basic setup and the need to dodge grease and truck parts to use the bathroom in the back of the truck mechanics building.

The current TK clinic building was completed in June 2007, and we opened a new clinic in Taupiri the same year, expanding our offering in the North Waikato.
The Te Kauwhata clinic felt huge at the time (at 200 sq meters, it was 10 times the size of our portacom), but it didn't take long for us to grow our vet and support team numbers, and along with some substantial population growth for Te Kauwhata itself, the need for an increased footprint has become apparent over recent years.

The opportunity to create more space for our team and expand operating and diagnostic services has led us to take over Carleys side of the current building, with building work expected to be completed before Christmas. The new clinic will include a larger retail area, office space, increased consultation and meeting rooms, state-of-the-art X-ray facilities, and a new surgical area to support more advanced surgical services, from routine procedures to complex orthopaedic operations.

Te Kauwhata is well positioned to be very central for many of the practice's sheep and beef clients. Along with the increased size of the clinic, the building changes are designed to develop Te Kauwhata as a 'working dog centre' for our clinics, with a focus on meeting the needs of the many farm working dogs in the wider region.

We recognise that there are differences in the needs of our working dogs and want to provide practical, working solutions from a team of vets with farm-vet backgrounds and a firsthand understanding of the roles our working dogs play in farming operations, combined with great facilities and state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment.

We will also welcome Veterinarian Steph Reid, who will join the TK team from our Kopu clinic in the new year. Steph has been appointed to the Sheep and Beef Lead Vet role to coordinate a stronger service offering for our sheep and beef clients and work with our farm vets across the practice. Steph will take a key role in parasite resistance management and the use of collar technology on our dry stock farms, amongst other key focus areas. Based at our new Working Dog Centre, we hope to make Te Kauwhata a future hub for sheep and beef in our region.

On the dairy side, we continue to work alongside a number of clients in the collar space, helping them gain value from this investment through improved herd health management, transition and nutrition changes to maximise production. Mastitis remains a key focus for us, as we see continued pressure from the wider industry to reduce antibiotic use. We are working more in the preventative space with teat scoring of herds, and early-season milk quality reviews, with success. Many of our clients are well down this path of reduced antibiotic use now and are seeing great results with teat sealants. We continue to work with clients to take a pragmatic approach to the changing landscape while staying within the rules, and we appreciate the great work our clients are doing in this space.

2026 will see us grow our team again, with three additional farm and mixed vets joining, along with growth in our tech teams, to ensure we continue to have the resources to service our clients into the next season.

Once again, I would like to thank you for your continued support and on behalf of the Franklin Vets team, best wishes for a safe and happy festive season.

Mark

BCS at calving impacts next season's repro – start planning now!

DR JASON FAYERS
BVM&S CertCHP
(Cattle Health
& Productivity)
Regional Manager

It's no surprise that BCS at calving affects reproductive performance. There's plenty of research out there, but it's always nice to see research backed up by real-life examples.

Last March, we BCS scored a whole herd at the planned start of calving and entered the results into Minda. Following the pregnancy testing in November, it was interesting to see how well the theory was backed up in the real world.

It's clear from the chart below, that cows with BCS 4.5 or below at calving have a significant effect on both the 6-week in-calf rate and the empty rate. If we repeated the scores at mating time, we would see a similar drop off for cows below BCS 4.0.

The dairy NZ targets of <15% cows below 5.0 at calving, with an average of 5.2-5.3 (including heifers), and <15% below 4.0 at mating, with an average of 4.2, are very relevant. Failing to hit these targets costs you not just in terms of future calving spread and days in milk but also in milk production. A cow that calves at 4.0 vs 5.0 will produce on average 12.5kg MS less.

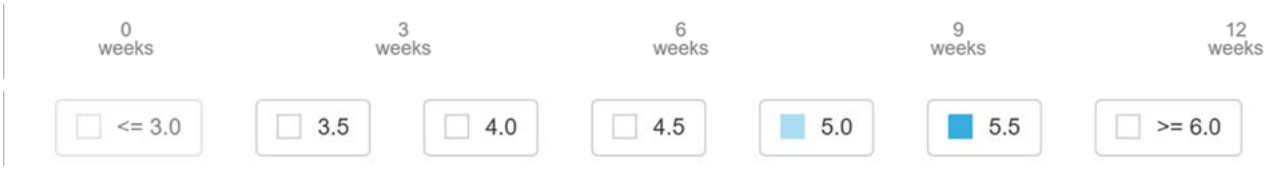
For autumn-calving herds, getting your vet to do an individual cow BCS score now and to draw up a dry-off plan with a dry-off date individualised for each cow (based on BCS score and expected calving date) is the best thing you can do to ensure cows hit target by calving.

Dairy NZ has a very good BCS gain tool – search under "dry cow supplements for BCS gain".

Using assumptions of, e.g., $380/kg per tonne of PKE and a $9.50 milk price, it costs $67 of PKE to put on 1 BCS score, with a benefit of $174 in extra milk and reproductive benefits. You can put in whatever supplements and prices you want to use in this scenario.

Making sure cows have enough days dry and then ensuring they have enough feed during the dry period are the keys to success next season. And if you are a spring-calving herd, planning starts sometime after pregnancy testing.

Hopefully, we have a good grass-growing summer, but autumn herds should be prepared to invest in supplements to achieve their repro and production goals for next season!



In-Calf Rate – Body Condition Scores as at Planned Start of Calving (PSC)

			In-calf rate				
BCS	Count		3 weeks	6 weeks	9 weeks	9+ weeks	Not in-calf rate
<= 3.0	*0*	*0%*	*0%*	*0%*	*0%*	*0%*	*0%*
3.5	4	0%	25%	75%	75%	75%	25%
4.0	49	5%	41%	65%	69%	71%	29%
4.5	345	38%	48%	68%	80%	83%	17%
5.0	177	20%	50%	73%	81%	85%	15%
5.5	54	6%	61%	78%	83%	87%	13%
>= 6.0	12	1%	42%	83%	83%	83%	17%
No BCS	*260*	*29%*	*52%*	*74%*	*85%*	*89%*	*11%*

WelFarm Testimonials

Designed by dairy veterinarians right here in New Zealand, WelFarm *is a tool to monitor dairy herd health and wellbeing. At Franklin Vets, we think* WelFarm *is a great programme to help you in reaching your farm performance and animal health goals. But don't take our word for it – this is what our clients had to say.*

DR DANIELLE THOMSON
BVSc (Dist.)
Veterinarian/
Branch Manager
Paeroa

"It's the way forward. Paeroa Vets is amazingly annoying at getting everything booked in, but it's good because I know that the vets have full access to everything and have their finger on the pulse with what's going on at both of our farms. It's good to have independent scoring and observations, and it takes the guesswork out. The last couple of years, we have really seen improvements, particularly in mating – everything is moving forward in the right direction."
Bevan Robinson, Owner/operator across two farms, PAEROA

"WelFarm formalises some processes we had on farm, and brings "outside the farm" credibility. It covers a wider, but good range of points, and it's helpful to farm owners to have another voice in the team focusing on a set of important animal-related measures."
Conall Buchanan, Farm owner, PAEROA

"I am a strong advocate for the WelFarm programme. I feel the price of the programme is very reasonable for what we gain from it. The end-of-the-season reports are helpful in determining which cows get culled and what improvements can be made on farm. I like that if there is an issue from an outside source with an animal that is lame or has a tail issue, I have all the data required to back me up, as the vets are monitoring these things through the programme."
Todd Reeves, Owner, GLENBROOK

"We first came across WelFarm at Fieldays a few years back and thought it looked like a good fit for our farm. It felt like a natural step up from what our vets were already doing with individual BCS at scanning. We also really liked the idea of proper reporting, especially as it seemed clear that providing good animal welfare was only going to get more important. At the time, there was a lot of talk about farming's social licence, so Welfarm felt like a smart way to help protect our business for the future. The yearly reports are a great chance to step back and look at what's going on from a different angle than you normally would. The comparison reports are especially handy — they help us figure out where our priorities are and where it makes sense to put time or money into improvements. The BCS monitoring through Welfarm helps us plan feed and milking intervals throughout the season. Because our vets have such a clear picture of what's happening with the herd, our conversations are more meaningful, and it's easier to sort things out quickly when something pops up. Overall, it's made decision-making easier, and the vet visits are more productive."
Alexia, Cronin Family farm, TAUPIRI

WelFarm is a vet-designed programme that:

- Creates a verified animal health plan
- Checks and reports herd health at critical times
- Uses targets and benchmarks for your farm
- Identifies your herd's health opportunities

WELFARM .co.nz

"I don't like to assume anything, so getting the reports with facts and numbers on them is important to me. Having this service in place helps me make decisions to improve profitability on farm. The first year with WelFarm, our loco scoring was not the best, so I felt justified in spending money on upgrading the races. It is also peace of mind knowing our animals are assessed from an outside source, so if any issues arise, we have the data to back up that our animals are being cared for."
Brad Cockrell, Owner, MERCER

"It means Leah is better informed because she has all the information – I like that, it feels like you have got another team member. The other big bonus is that all of the welfare issues are documented by a trusted third party and are verified, and whoever wants to check up on us can retrieve it. It's peace of mind for me that there are more people checking my cows. I have seen places where tail damage has been horrendous, and there wasn't any pre- and post-documentation; there was nothing. It also means that I get to talk to Leah one-to-one more often, so if there is anything niggling or current, I can get her opinion on it. It's a tailored approach to veterinary service. I think we are getting better informed service and value for money."
Geoff Rowson, Owner/operator, WAIHI

"We've been using Welfarm for a couple of years now. We've got four sheds in supply, and we work over all of them. Once calving is over, we don't spend enough time with the cows, and we needed to make sure they were getting looked after how we wanted them looked after. Welfarm is a good monitoring tool. There's the management circle of plan, monitor and control, and it fits in with the monitoring component really well because it's programmed in, so that's when it happens, it just gets done. We've found it very useful for the end-of-season individual body condition score and feeding that info into the dry-off decisions. There are pretty good reasons to do the condition scores at the times of year that they are booked in, and it's the benefit of the third party, having someone else come in. You might think your cows look pretty bloody good, but having someone who's doing a number of herds over that period, they have a better eye than I do just looking at my own. It also provides records if someone has concerns, such as MPI, and the comparison data between our farms and across the region is useful. So there are good reasons there for people that have multiple operations that aren't necessarily milking the cows all the time, and there are reasons there for people that have one farm that make it worth doing."
Nick Choat Sharemilker across multiple farms, WAIHI

Artificial Intelligence in Farming

Is AI a yay or a nay?

DR GREG LINDSAY
BVSc
Farm Vet & Regional Manager, Kopu

With technology advancing at a pace not seen for some time, it's easy to tune out and let it all happen around you. Absolutely… life will go on; the grass will grow, the cows will milk, and the sun will continue to rise and set (we hope!). But what opportunities are you missing out on?

Artificial intelligence is still largely a foreign concept to many of us. Beyond videos of Will Smith eating spaghetti or rabbits jumping on trampolines, we don't really understand what it is, how it works, and, most importantly, what it could do for us!

Modern New Zealand dairy farmers are tasked with a huge amount of compliance paperwork, performance reviews, and data-based decision-making. It is here that I feel there is a huge opportunity to leverage the power of AI to complete these 'office tasks' more efficiently, allowing you to get back outdoors to what you enjoy doing!

While AI may seem a complex and daunting place to play, it is essential to start doing just that. Playing with AI tools (Copilot, Chat-GPT, etc) and familiarising yourself with how to make requests to complete and perform tasks. Often it is as simple as feeding the tool some information (i.e., a copy of your dairy records or spreadsheet of your herd profile alongside sire options) and asking it to provide you answers to a specific question – i.e. "from the lists provided, allocate a sire and semen type to each cow based on these rules…"

AI may not provide all the answers in the first instance, but you can repeat the process and refine your requests until you're happy with the output. The key thing is to be bold, experiment and play. Take some time to consider the office tasks that keep you off the farm and ask yourself if there is an opportunity to automate the process or at least part of it. Start small, creating rosters or writing farm policy documents, perhaps? AI won't replace farmers, but farmers who use AI may outperform those who don't.

Written with zero help from AI

Teat Scoring at Franklin Vets

What have we found this spring?

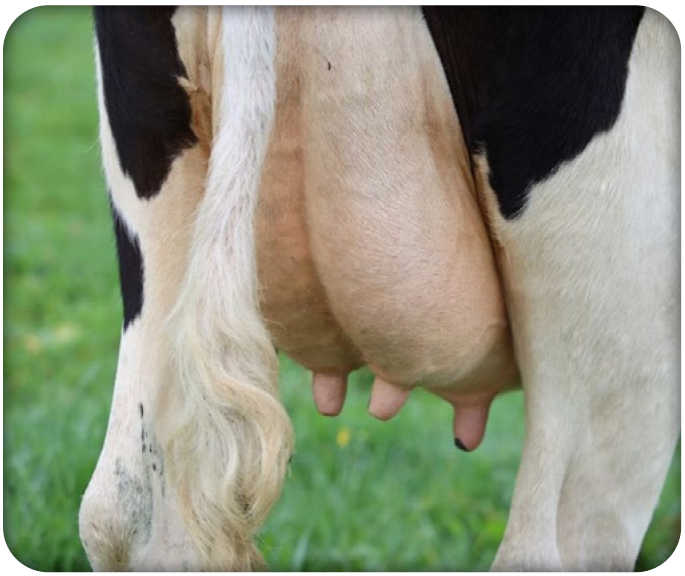
DR DAVID HAWKINS
BVSc
Veterinary Consultant,
Te Kauwhata

Our teams have been out scoring cow teats on farms across the region. If you are lucky enough, you have had a teat scoring completed on our new phone-based app. This makes it easier to show you what we have found this spring.

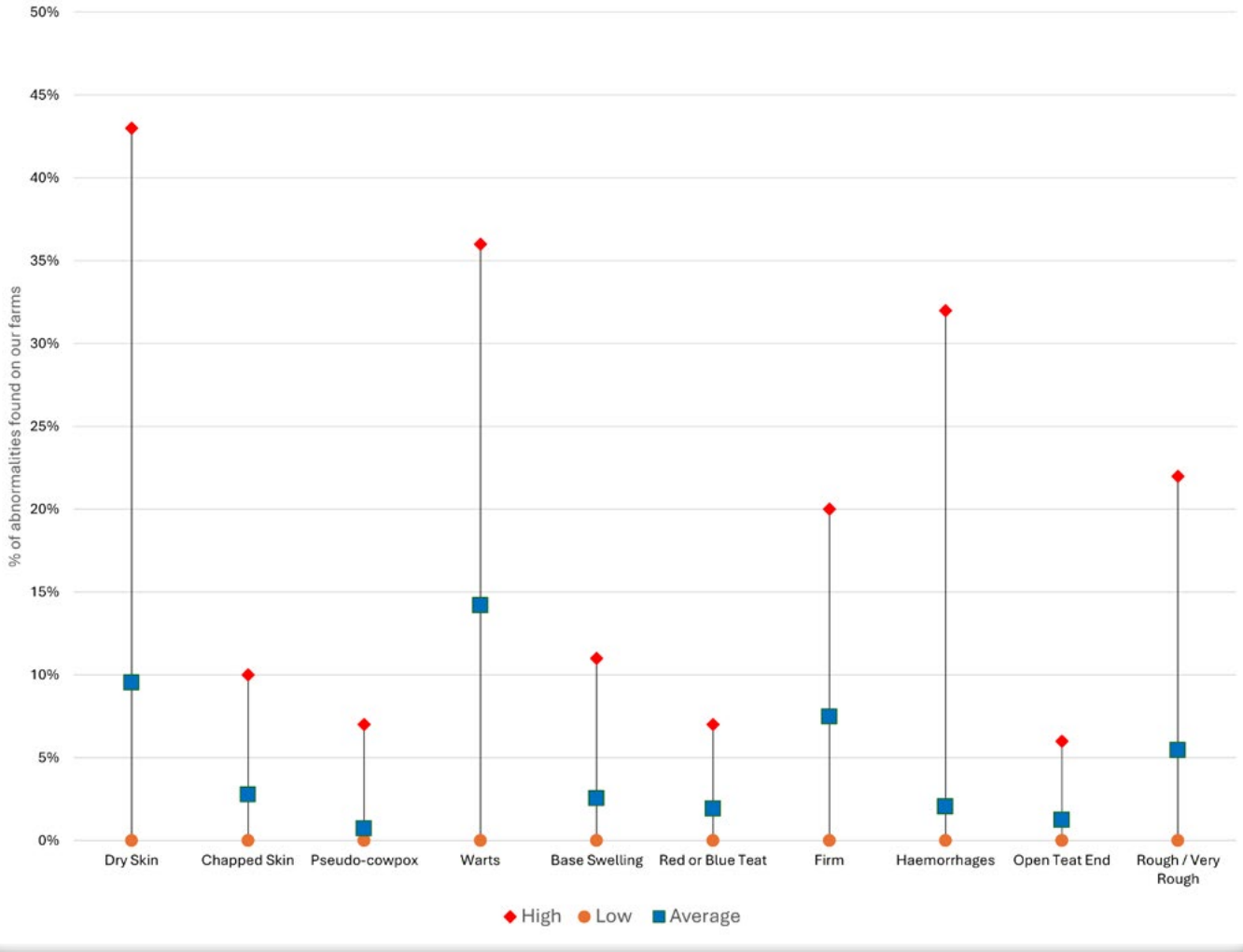
We have scored 2086 cows through the new app. Just over ⅓ of cows had some teat abnormality present. Half of the farms scored triggered an alert in the areas of teat spray efficacy, teat congestion or teat end damage.

The biggest work-on identified was the area of teat spray efficacy. But we also identified farms where improvements can be made in the machine/liner setup and in the interaction between milkers and cows.

The chart below shows what we found and how many. The large variations we saw mean farmers need to consider what is happening specifically in their herds. If you are interested in how teat scoring helps you improve mastitis, call your local clinic to arrange one now.



Types of teat abnormalities on farms scored in October – November



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Heat Stress

DR CLAUDIA KNILL
BVSc
Farm Vet, Taupiri

When cattle experience a heat load greater than their capacity to release it, heat stress results. The optimal temperature range for cattle is 4º-20º; hence, heat stress can occur at temperatures above 20º. Significantly, heat stress can negatively affect the welfare and production of our cattle, making it an important consideration as the days get warmer.

High ambient temperature is a major environmental factor in the development of heat stress. Others include exposure to solar radiation, high humidity, low air movement, poor shade, and limited water availability. It is also important to note that cows generate large amounts of heat during digestion, walking and milk production.

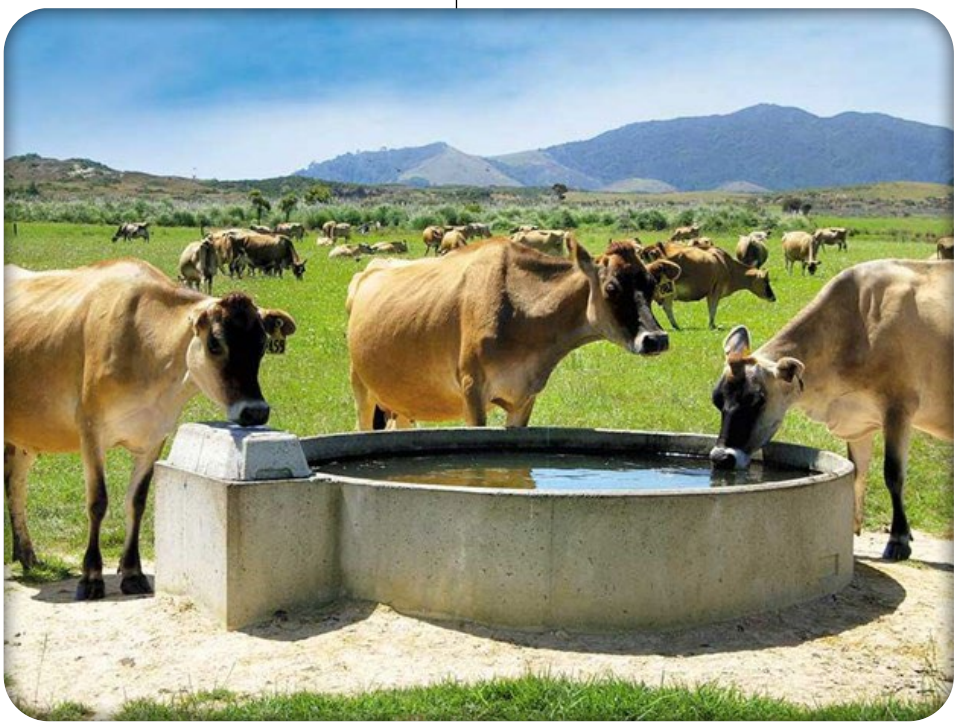
Symptoms of heat stress include:

- Increase in water consumption and crowding around water troughs
- Reduced grazing
- Shade seeking
- Increased breathing rate
- Drooling
- Slower walking speed
- Reduced milk production
- If you are utilising wearables that provide temperature data, they may show elevated body temperatures.

While heat cannot be prevented, farms will benefit from implementing practices that will help to minimise heat stress in their herds:

- Provide paddocks with higher shade during summer
- Graze closer to the shed during the day to reduce walking times in the heat
- Ensure sufficient water supply
- Ensure cows have adequate space in the yard
- Consider installing fans and/or sprinklers in the shed
- Consider milking later in the day when temperatures are lower and/or once a day milking
- Consider providing high-energy feeds to compensate for reduced intake and/or those that support immunity and digestive health during the heat stress season.

As the saying goes, “prevention is better than cure” from both a welfare and production perspective. Understandably, prevention is not always feasible; therefore, the importance of recognising heat stress early should not be underestimated to mitigate its effects and improve outcomes.



Right Dog for the Job Project

DR LEAH WAKEFORD
BVSc (Dist)
Veterinarian & Branch Manager, Waihi

Over the last six months, Franklin Vets has been collecting samples on behalf of Massey University for the *'Right Dog for the Job'* research project. The project aims to identify genetic variants in New Zealand's working dog population that may affect their health or farm performance. There has been significant research on other dog breeds regarding the genetic diseases they may carry, but very little on what may be present in our hard-working farm dogs.

To date, the project has sequenced 249 dogs, including 130 Huntaways, 104 Heading Dogs and 15 crossbreds. It was expected that there would be some similarities between our population and the genetic variants seen in Border Collies due to the significant influence of collies on the gene pool, but the team have identified some surprises. There are 400 key variants known in other breeds, and 27 of these have been identified so far through gene sequencing. Five of the variants have been frequent enough to warrant further testing and investigation (the below is an extract from a Massey University press release dated 17th of February 2025, author unknown);

1. CUBN variant – causes cobalamin (vitamin B12) malabsorption, leading to serious health issues if untreated. Treatment is available, so proactive testing could help identify affected dogs and improve breeding decisions. Six carriers were identified.

2. CLN8 variant – leads to a neurodegenerative disorder causing loss of motor functions, seizures and blindness. Affected dogs usually need to be euthanised early. The frequency of this variant was quite high, with 21 carriers identified (mostly Heading Dogs).

3. SGSH variant – causes a neurodegenerative disease known as mucopolysaccharidosis IIIA, which has already been linked to Huntaways. Five carriers were identified, and routine testing for this variant is recommended given the disease's severity.

4. SOD1 variant – linked to degenerative myelopathy (DM), a disease that affects the spinal cord and leads to mobility loss. This variant has 'variable penetrance', meaning not all dogs with two copies of the variant will show symptoms, but the risk should still be monitored, particularly in Huntaways. Forty-six carriers were identified.

5. VWF variant – causes Von Willebrand disease I (VWF1), which leads to excessive bleeding after injury or surgery. Nine carriers and one affected dog were found in the study. This variant also shows variable penetrance, but testing could still help prevent health complications.

Our team has been hard at work collecting samples for the next phase of the study – to date, 60 of our hardworking canine friends have contributed to the future of our working dogs. Sampling is pain-free and involves a cheek swab to collect some cells containing DNA for sequencing. We also take some measurements: muzzle circumference, chest circumference, height and length from the base of the skull to the top of the tail.

It's not too late to participate!

Get in touch with your local Franklin Vets clinic if you are interested, and the team can organise for your dog (or dogs!) to join the study. You get a free genotype profile of your dog as well as regular updates on research findings throughout the 3-year project.