



# FranklinVets UPDate

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## Happy New Year!

Summer has been relatively kind to farmers in our region this year with westerly winds bringing regular doses of rain to keep things ticking over. While the winds weren't overly conducive to holiday-making, hopefully, you've all enjoyed some time away.

Early February saw day-time temperatures crank up a notch which has put the squeeze on pastures, milk production and your local vets! You can always trust the winds and cooler weather to bugger off once we start scanning...

Scanning results have trended in the right direction, though, with 6-week in-calf rates up 2-3% on last year and empty rates currently on par with previous seasons at around 11.5%. Normally, we would expect empty rates to have dropped with higher 6-week in-calf rates. My suspicion is that this 'irregular improvement' rests largely with the heifers (1st calvers), who are leading the pack, being 6-7% ahead in the 6-week in-calf rate but with similar empty rates (due to high fertility).

If you remember, back to our Xmas

newsletter, this was predicted in our submission rate data, which showed a massive improvement in the heifer subset. Feed conditions were significantly better through Spring, and this appears to have benefited first-calvers. It serves as a general reminder of the need to prioritise younger animals since they make up most of any herd by year born. Summer feed conditions and disease challenges are stalling points on a young heifer's growth journey if poorly managed.

Read on to learn more about doing right by your herd's future best producers!





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# Could it still be facial eczema?

*Not all cows get sunburnt, or even clinical signs*

When you hear 'facial eczema' (FE), the most common image that comes to mind is the Friesian cow with red and peeling white patches hiding under the tree. Or the sheep, with drooping ears and blistered faces. However, it is important to remember that more damage lies under the surface. The easily recognisable sign of sunburn is a result of severe liver damage. Not all animals with liver damage show outward signs (subclinical disease). Some articles suggest that there will be 10 cows with subclinical facial eczema for every clinical case. Others suggest that only around 5% of a mob will show the "classic" sunburn signs.

Facial eczema is caused by a fungus (*Pithomyces chartarum*) that grows in the pasture. The fungal spores contain a toxin (sporidesmin) that causes liver damage.

This damage means that the liver doesn't function as well, and byproducts usually dealt with by the liver can build up.

## Other signs of liver damage due to FE include:

- Drop in milk production
- Loss of appetite
- Lethargy
- Weight loss
- Yellow mucous membranes, such as the vulva or around the eyes (jaundice)
- Poor growth in young stock
- Reduced reproductive performance.

The damage caused to the liver is irreversible and, therefore, can affect animals for the rest of their lives.

As vets, FE is always on our radar when looking at a sick cow, alpaca, sheep or



mob of ill thrift calves. We can test liver enzyme levels in the blood to determine the extent of liver damage, even if without sunburn. We monitor farms through grass samples for spore counts during the risk period. However, spore numbers can vary significantly between neighbouring farms and even on the same farm.

The main way to protect stock from FE is to give them zinc during the risk period. There are many ways to supplement zinc to stock, including in-water, in-feed, and zinc blousing. Mode of administration and dosage is important and will vary from farm to farm. However, zinc blousing is the only way to ensure every animal receives the correct dose. This is especially important in youngstock.

**If you have any questions about FE or would like advice on creating a prevention plan for this season, contact your local Franklin Vets clinic.**

## NEED HELP? NEED TO TALK?



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**SUPPORTING RURAL PEOPLE THROUGH THE TOUGH TIMES**

# Monitoring in the Face of Growing Drench Resistance



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Your calves are the future of your herd, so growing them to reach their potential is important. In our pasture-based systems, parasitism is a major factor that can knock back growth rates once calves are weaned and on grass. In the past, our advice has been to regularly drench calves to combat this. Unfortunately, the parasites have caught up! We are increasingly seeing the development of resistance and subsequent drench breakdown on properties rearing young stock.

This means we must 'reinvent the wheel' when protecting our youngstock from parasitism. The use of drenching needs to be reserved for only when it is absolutely necessary, leaning on other management techniques to minimise the impacts of parasitism in these animals.

One cornerstone of this approach is increasing the amount of monitoring through faecal egg counts (FECs). FECs can be utilised in two ways:

**1.** To monitor the parasite burden to inform our drenching decisions. This involves collecting faecal samples when you believe calves are due a drench. Samples can be taken from individual calves or as a pooled sample (discuss with your vet which strategy is best for your farm). The number of eggs seen in each sample can then be used as a proxy for parasite burden. Combined with other factors (i.e. general health, condition, feed availability), we can decide whether drenching is necessary. In many cases, we can lengthen drench intervals and reduce the amount of drench used on farm.

**2.** To monitor the development of any drench resistance. If drenching is effective, parasite eggs should be absent from faeces following drenching. Collecting faecal samples 10-14 days post drenching to check this is a good initial step to monitor for any resistance developing on your farm. If eggs are present in these samples, your vet may recommend further testing in the form of a Drench Check or Faecal Egg Count Reduction Test so that the current efficacy of the drench can be calculated and to identify which actives may be failing. Drench efficacy must fall below 60% before we see clinical signs of resistance. Regular monitoring allows us to

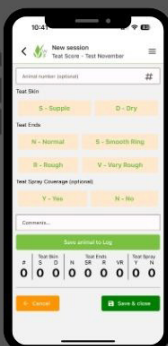
identify issues earlier when things can be more easily turned around before we are dealing with full-blown drench failure.

As alluded to above, responsible drenching is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to managing parasitism on your farm. Reducing exposure to parasites by managing pasture contamination and ensuring calves are in good health and well-fed to start building their immunity are also essential factors. As we head towards autumn and the weather becomes more

moist/humid, there is the opportunity for larval pasture contamination to rise. However, spring calves should be starting to develop immunity to parasites, so faecal egg counts should be used to inform drenching decisions to only use drench when required. This is also the time of year when vets/techs are regularly on farm for the likes of vaccination, bolusing, and weighing visits, presenting good opportunities to collect samples at the same time.



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# Wobbly woes

## Ryegrass staggers

Ryegrass staggers (not to be confused with 'staggers' caused by low magnesium), is a nervous disorder of grazing animals. It is caused by high levels of chemicals produced by endophytes in (mostly older) pastures. These chemicals

are then eaten by stock when grazing. However, over the past 20 years, endophytes that do not produce this chemical have become available.

Outbreaks of ryegrass staggers are sporadic and more likely in summer and

autumn when stock is more likely to be grazing seed heads or down to the base of the pasture, where the chemical is in its highest concentration. Stock is most at risk after a long, hot, dry spell followed by rain. Animals develop signs within 7-14 days of being placed on toxic pastures. Calves seem more susceptible to ryegrass staggers.

### Signs

- Tremors in the neck and head
- Heavy tremors and stiff legs
- Staggered gait and incoordination
- Fall over when disturbed
- Dairy cows 'grumpier' than usual.
- Jumpy, twitchy and over-reactive to stimuli such as loud noises.

Animals rarely die from ryegrass staggers. Most stock losses are due to misadventure.

### Prevention

Specific management will vary from farm to farm. In general, management practices that increase the leaf content of ryegrass and reduce intake of seed heads or stock grazing close to the ground will reduce the chance of ryegrass staggers.

- Feeding a high-quality supplement
- Keep post-grazing residuals high
- Pasture topping or mowing of seed heads
- Grazing endophyte-free/low-endophyte/novel-endophyte ryegrass pastures if available (break feed if only a small area is available).

### Management of stock with ryegrass staggers

There is no specific treatment for grass staggers.

- Avoid disturbing stock if possible. Do not yard, etc. If necessary to move, do so slowly.
- Manage separate from the main herd. Reduce milking frequency.
- Feed a high-quality supplement to reduce intake of ryegrass
- Feed pasture of another species, e.g. chicory or endophyte-safe ryegrasses
- Keep away from paddocks with hazards; ponds, drains etc.

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