



The Vet Centre

WAIPU | RUAWAI | MANGAWHAI | MAUNGATUROTO | RUAKĀKĀ

February/March
2026

Welcome to the February/March Farm Newsletter

It's a new year, which means it is time to start thinking about facial eczema, along with the thousands of other farm jobs that need to get done. Our handy vet techs have been completing grass spore counts and have found that some areas have already reached (and exceeded) the alert level of over 30,000 spores. *The Vet Centre* is sending weekly reports via email, and you can always check the Awanui website, the Awanui Veterinary – Lab Portal, and your local clinic's spore count boards to see where the counts are for your area and how they are trending. Remember, prevention is better than cure, especially in this instance, where more often than not, you don't see the damage until it is too late. *Faceguard* zinc bolus is by far the best individual preventive option for cattle and sheep. Your local clinic has these on hand. If you are worried about your animals, bring in a grass

sample for testing. A half-bag of grass cut at the dirt level is enough for us to test in the clinic, at only \$10, which is a small amount for peace of mind and protecting your animal's liver.

Health and safety are a big focus for our farm team this year. We have been discussing risk assessment for all farm tasks along with equipment and venue. It has come to our attention that some yards and vet races are not safe for our team when they have been on farm. With that in mind, we are asking farmers to please take some time to check over and maintain yards and vet races that need so much longed-for TLC. One of our team members may even talk to you, maybe when on the farm, about options to make the area safer for all. Let's look after each other to ensure your animals get the help they deserve and that both our and your farm team get home safely every day.



IN THIS ISSUE

- **Body Condition Scoring, who, what, when?**
- **Lameness... again.**
- **The Value of TeatCheck - Part of the Gold Standard to produce more milk of higher quality.**
- **Milk cultures kicking off 2026**
- **Equine Heel Bulb Lacerations: Why We Often Recommend a Cast.**
- **Rural events in the region**
- **Lifestyle info**



Body condition scoring

who, what, when?

Our team of accredited DairyNZ BCS (Body Condition Score) assessors can assist you in monitoring the health and productivity of dairy cows by assessing their body fat. Use of BCS to make informed decisions about your herd management, ensuring the wellbeing of your cows and maximising dairy production. The best way to ensure independent, accurate and consistent body condition scoring using the DairyNZ method is to use a Certified BCS Assessor.

The Vet Centre certified BCS team consists of vets and techs: Dr Sarah Briggs, Dr Thomas Traill, Dr Ellie Green, Jenna Fraser, Kallum Green, and Nicole Hill.

For the farmer, the BCS assessment process is pretty simple. For a herd average, the assessor will take a stroll in the paddock with the cows and score at least 70 cows selected at random – no need for the farmer to stay around after meeting the assessor. If you require all your cows to be scored, this allows individual management and is most important in summer and autumn. There are five ideal times of the year to check, but do what works best for your own farming situation. For an average herd, the BCS check and report cost is \$129.00 each visit, including a report.

- **Summer and Autumn** are the most important times for BCS. This allows individual groups of cows to be managed differently to ensure BCS targets at calving are met.
- **Pre-Christmas assessment:** Determines if cows have gained BCS since the planned start of mating and allows a management plan for the autumn to be set up.
- **Mid-February to mid-March:** Assessing cows determines if the management plan is working or if some cows should be dried off early, milked once a day (OAD), or preferentially fed.
- **Pre-calving:** Assessing BCS (in springer mob) determines if the autumn management plan achieved the calving BCS targets and whether there is a need to reassess management practices for next autumn.
- **The planned start of mating:** Helps determine how much BCS cows lost between calving and mating. This will identify if getting cows back in calf is at risk as well, and whether anything should have been done differently to prevent the BCS loss.

Factors that affect BCS loss

BCS can help determine energy requirements. Although increasing cow intake or reducing milking frequency post-calving takes several weeks to influence BCS, these management strategies can advance the point at which BCS loss ceases (nadir). Read more about [different strategies for improving Body Condition Score](#) on the DairyNZ website. Cow genetics and BCS at calving have a stronger influence on BCS loss post-calving than nutrition or milking frequency during this period. The modern-day dairy cow is genetically predisposed to produce milk at the expense of body reserves during this period. In some cows, this can mean that 2-3 kg per day of body reserves are mobilised post-calving to support milk production.

Ideally, a cow should lose no more than 1 BCS unit from calving through to mating, with the aim of having all cows past the lowest point of energy balance and at a minimum BCS of 4.0 at the planned start of mating. This BCS profile will optimise milk production, while ensuring reproduction and animal health are not compromised. The range in body condition score (BCS) is as important as the average BCS at





calving. A BCS of 5.0 for mixed-age cows and 5.5 for first and second calvers is optimal for each animal, as well as a herd target.

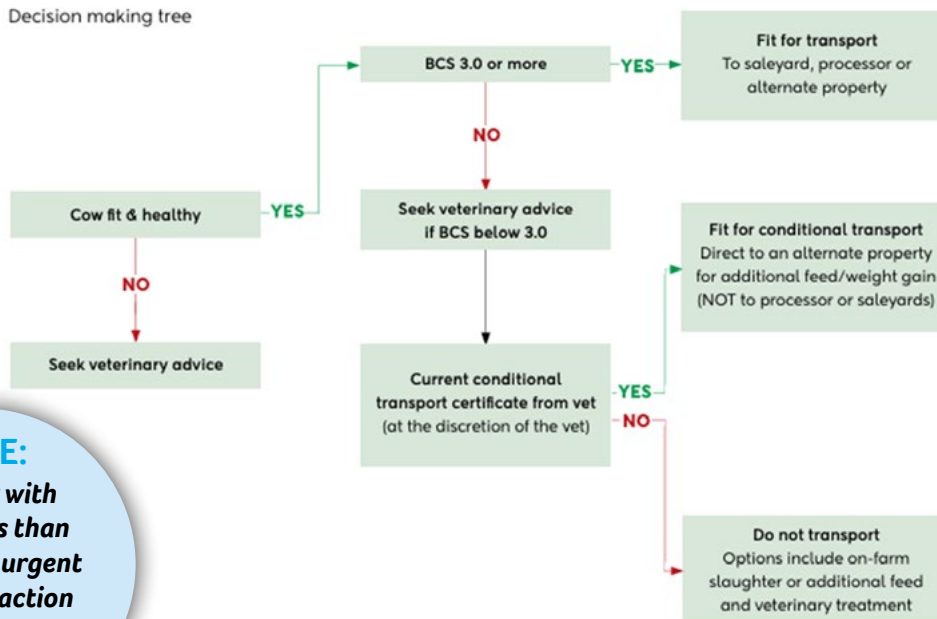
The cows at greatest risk of poor reproductive performance are first- and second-calvers. We know that within a herd, there will always be a range of BCS, as each animal has a slightly different metabolism, intake, and milk production.

The challenge is to keep the spread in BCS at calving as small as possible, within the above targets. There are several strategies to achieve this.

- Dry off low-producing, fat cows early. Ensure you have a herd test to get the data needed to assist in decision-making.
- Weigh and track heifers for growth weight trends and BCS. The heifer target is BCS 5.5 upon entry to the herd to reduce stress during the transition period and ensure they can compete with the mixed-aged cows.
- Give first and second-calvers more time to dry than the mixed-aged cows. They are still young and growing. This gives them a chance to reach their mature weight.
- Preferential feeding on split dry herds based on BCS requirements and calving dates. Collect data to make good decisions.

Transport restrictions based on BCS

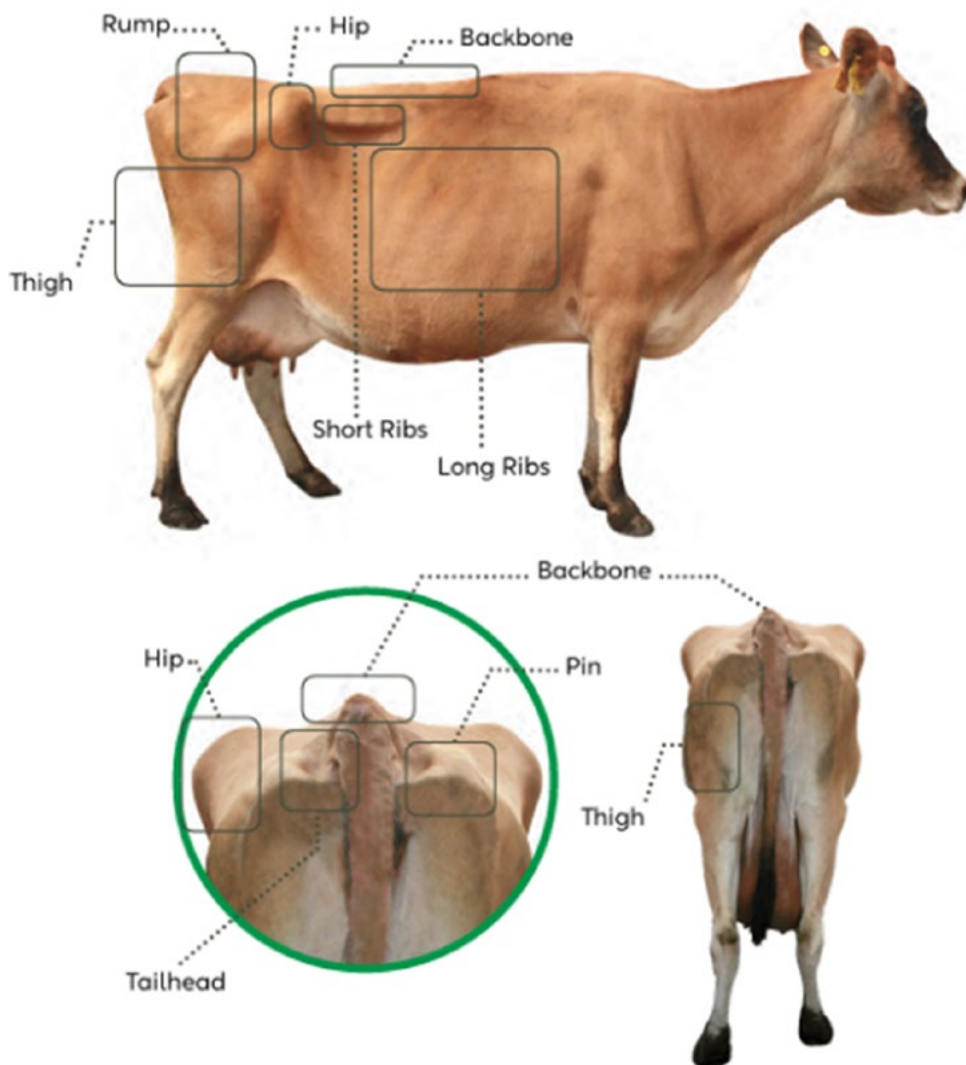
Decision making tree



NOTE:

Any cow with a BCS less than 3 requires urgent remedial action and cannot be transported.

Important body points to consider when condition scoring cows



Talk to one of our helpful large-animal team members to book your body condition score today.

You may be surprised.



Why did the farmer win an award?

ANSWER ON PAGE 8



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Lameness... again

Think smarter, not harder.
Hoof care can be simple and easy to treat when done early.

It's proven that summer and early autumn are the worst periods for unexpected lameness spikes. At *The Vet Centre* over the past three months, we have had many farm call-outs for lameness.

- Bruising of the hoof, footrot, assessment with no trim = 34 cows treated.
- Early whiteline disease, sole penetration, toe abscess with trim = 41 cows treated.
- Advanced whiteline disease, severely underrun lesion with trim = 28 cows treated.
- Advanced lameness and corrective trim = 4 cows treated.

Below is a snapshot breakdown from just 2 farms visited over the three months with ongoing treatments. Sole penetration or hoof abscess is the most diagnosed problem on these farms in particular.

Some contributing factors to lameness are long walks to paddocks, rough tracks, and heat stress. Changing moisture levels are risk factors for lameness that show up later in the season.

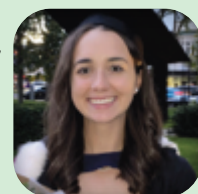
A few quick checks can prevent a lot of headaches:

- Early intervention is imperative to reduce pain
- Check for height difference between claws
- Now is a good time for preventative hoof trimming – if you do not have time, then call for a vet or tech to come out.
- Try to avoid long-distance walking in the heat of the day
- Keep hoof knives sharp. If your knives took a hiding in 2025, now is the time to send them in for sharpening or replace any tools that have seen better days.

STAFF NEWS

We said a warm see ya later to not only Vet Dr Ashlee, but also Vet Dr Tara.

After three years with us, **Dr Ashlee Larsen** has taken on an awesome opportunity to live and work in Sydney with her partner and friends.



Dr Tara Brophy headed down to the Waikato to be with family at the end of January 2026, after two years with us.



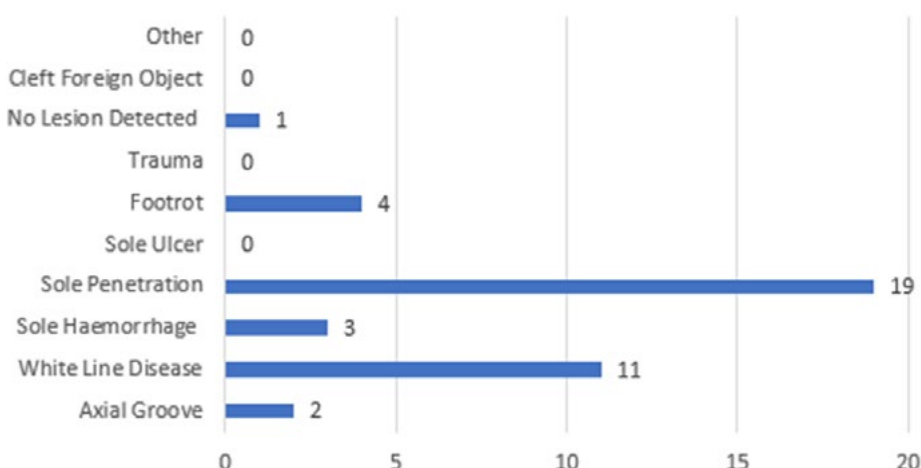
They both joined us brand-new out of vet school, and we could not be prouder of where they are now as experienced and compassionate vets.

On the flip side, we say a warm welcome to new graduate vet **Dr Cam Nahill**.



Cam will be based out of the Waipu clinic, but we are sure you will get to meet him on his travels across our *Vet Centre* clinics and farms. We are super excited to have him join us.

Lesion Causing Lameness





The Value of TeatCheck

Part of the Gold Standard to produce more milk of higher quality.

Maintaining a Bulk Milk Somatic Cell Count (BMSCC) below 150,000 cells/mL indicates a healthy, productive herd. Mastitis is the end result of complex interactions between the cow, bacteria, environment, milking

machine and the farmer, so the question is – where do we start?

Thankfully, the answer is right in front of us – at the teats!

By regularly TeatChecking 50 cows for teat skin and teat end condition

through lactation, we can understand where to take action to limit bacteria on the cows' teats and reduce the risk of bacteria entering the udder through the teat canal and causing mastitis.

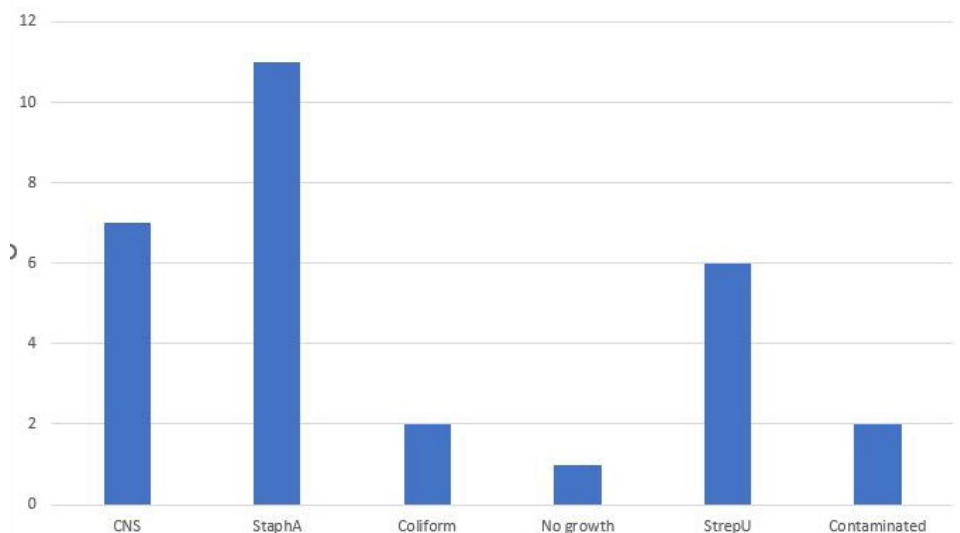
At least two TeatChecks are recommended each season. The first at the end of calving and again in mid-lactation to ensure early detection of any issues and to monitor progress as the season unfolds. Our techs can come out and complete a teatcheck assessment during milking to give you a benchmark to start your teatcheck season plan. Followed up by a vet discussion to make a targeted management action plan and happier cows. Phone your local clinic to book in now.

Healthy teat skin and teat ends reduce the risk of bacteria entering the teat canal and causing mastitis.

Milk cultures kicking off 2026

January has been busy for our farm team, conducting in-clinic testing by culturing the bacteria in the milk samples collected. Out of 26 samples tested in January, six had Streptococcus uberis, seven had CNS (coagulase-negative staphylococci), eleven had Staphylococcus aureus, two had Escherichia coli (E.coli), one had no growth, and two had more than one bacterium present. Knowing which bacteria are present and recording the results of any milk samples tested can provide a better understanding and a report to support more informed treatment choices.

Milk Culture Results January 2026



Our testing can be done at any time of the year, so if you need answers, please bring in clean milk samples to your local clinic. Prices start at \$20 for testing, a report, and a discussion about treatment.





Equine Heel Bulb Lacerations:

Why We Often Recommend a Cast

Heel bulb lacerations may look like minor cuts, but in horses, they are notoriously difficult injuries to heal. The reason is simple: the heel bulbs are in constant motion. Every step stretches the wound; every trot or canter puts it to the test - and even the best bandage struggles to fully restrict movement in this area.

That's where a cast comes in. While it can look a little dramatic at first, casting is actually one of the most effective ways to help heel bulb lacerations heal safely and efficiently.

How casting helps

For heel bulb lacerations, we commonly apply a foot cast, which encloses the hoof and extends up the pastern to around the level of the fetlock. This fibreglass cast significantly reduces movement at the coffin and pastern joints, as well as side-to-side motion of the heel bulbs.

By limiting movement in this way, a cast:

- Helps prevent the wound from reopening
- Reduces pain at the injury site
- Keeps the area cleaner
- Reduces strain on sutures and healing tissue.

Bandages can achieve some of these goals, but without the added stability of a cast, controlling movement can be very difficult. Immobilisation is the key to successful healing, and it's the main reason we often recommend casting rather than bandaging alone.



Non-healing heel bulb laceration.



4 weeks later, completely healed following a foot cast for 3 weeks.



Emily, one of our incredibly talented vet nurse/techs, applying a fibreglass foot cast in the field.

What about cost?

A cast does add a little extra cost at the first visit, which can understandably make owners hesitate. However, in our experience, casting often reduces the overall cost of treatment.

This is because it usually means:

- Fewer repeated bandage changes
- Fewer vet visits
- Less risk of wounds breaking down and needing re-suturing
- Faster overall healing.

Just as importantly, it saves your time - with less bandage management, less cleaning, and less worry while the wound heals.

Casting heel bulb lacerations isn't about doing "more" - it's about doing what works best. While it may look and feel like a bigger step initially, a well-fitted cast can make a significant difference to healing and comfort.

When we recommend a cast, it's because we believe it gives your horse the best chance of healing properly the first time, helping to reduce setbacks, cost, and frustration in the long run.



Rural Events in the region

Dairy NZ

Wednesday 11th February.

Time to talk policy.

3.30pm – 5pm at the FMG office,

3 Dent St, Whangarei.

Register online.

Thursday, Friday and Saturday

26th–28th February.

Northland Field Days.

9am – 4pm.

33 Awakino Point East Road,

Dargaville. All welcome.

Saturday 7th March.

Northland NZ Dairy Industry Awards

Dinner. 6pm–10pm. Copthorne

Hotel, Paihia.

Tickets are available online.

Tuesday 17th March.

Using tech for smarter outcomes.

11am – 1pm. Ruatangata Hall,

1190 Pipiwai Road, Ruatangata.

Register online.

Wednesday 19th March.

Using tech for smarter outcomes.

11am – 1pm. Sportsville Dargaville,

Memorial Park, Logan Street,

Dargaville. Register online.

Thursday 19th March.

Technology for future fit farming.

11am – 1pm.

Greg McCracken,

150 Mangawhai Road, Te Hana,

SN15528. Register online.

Lifestyle Info

We know life on the farm can get busy, and finding the time to do all the animal health jobs can get away from us. That's where our friendly vet and vet technician team can step in and help you out. We can take care of routine preventative health treatments, so you can relax knowing your animals are well looked after.

This includes;

- Hoof trimming
- Drenching, weighing, worm checks and vaccinating
- Lice and fly treatments
- Disbudding, docking and castration.

If you are new to lifestyle farming or just want to ensure you are doing the right thing, we are always happy to talk it over and point you in the right direction. We even have a lifestyle farm package for any species that helps make life on the farm easier.

Goats – Summer and autumn are the worst times of year for any hooved animal, especially goats. Regular hoof trims are the best and easiest option to prevent your goat friend from hoof diseases and damage that requires medical attention.

All our techs are equipped to visit you and give your goat a good hoof trim.

Sheep – With the heat and moisture combination setting in, now is a good time to ensure you have plenty of clean drinking water

on hand and make sure your fly treatment is up to date. If your sheep has been shorn 4 weeks or more ago, apply a dose of *Clik Extra*; it will last for 26 weeks, until the end of summer. If you have an active case of fly, *Cyrex* is your best option. Like goats, ensure your sheep have had a good hoof trim to reduce their toes curling.



Cattle – Ticks from long pasture are still an issue. These blood-sucking parasites harm your growing stock and are a huge nuisance, causing irritable animals.

The Vet Centre recommends *Bantix* for tick treatment, which we have in smaller bottles for your convenience. Ensure you provide your cattle with shelter and shade this time of year, along with plenty of clean drinking water.



Alpaca – Revise their grazing needs, dry summer pasture is very different to spring grass. Monitor for signs of facial eczema. If you are unsure if your pasture has spores, bring in a half-bread bag of grass, cut near dirt level, for us to check it's safe before grazing.



ANSWER

Because he was outstanding in his field.

Waipu Clinic

53 The Centre
Waipu
P 09 432 0693

Opening Hours

Monday–Friday:
8.00am–5.00pm
Saturdays:
9.00am–12.30pm

Ruawai Clinic

23 Jellicoe Road
Ruawai
P 09 439 2506

Opening Hours

Monday–Friday:
8.00am – 5.00pm
Saturdays: CLOSED

Mangawhai Clinic

36 Moir St
Mangawhai
P 09 431 4535

Opening Hours

Monday–Friday:
8.00am – 5.00pm
Saturdays:
9.00am – 12:30pm

Maungaturoto Clinic

184 Hurndall St
Maungaturoto
P 09 431 8318

Opening Hours

Monday–Friday:
8.00am – 5.00pm
Saturdays: CLOSED

Ruakākā Clinic

385 Marsden Point Road
Ruakākā
P 09 433 4916

Opening Hours

Monday–Friday:
8.00am – 5.00pm
Saturdays: CLOSED