Reducing stress around calving time in Far North Queensland

Left to Right: Angus Fraser, Gavin Johnson, Maree Hamilton and Gavan Doull

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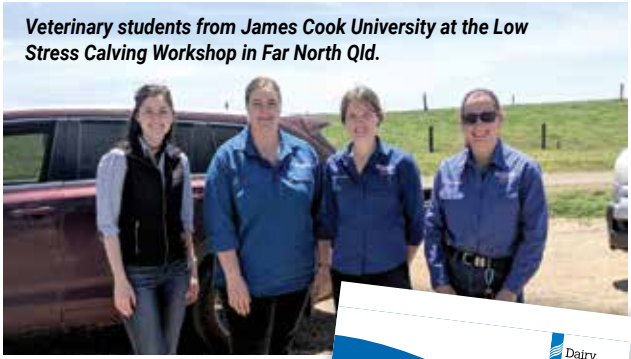
On the Thursday 19th September, we ran a Low Stress Calving session in Far North Queensland at Cheelonga Farming. Nine farmers attended the day along with fourth year veterinary students from James Cook University, and local service providers. Dr Bill Tranter facilitated the day which started with a classroom style discussion focussing on the theory that underpins transition cow management and why it is so important. Following on from this, Jason Graham shared the transition cow management story for Cheelonga and how he is constantly striving to improve this part of his business. After a quick bite to eat for lunch, participants were taken on a brief tour of the springer paddock, the silage pit, and the feedpad, where springers are fed.

Correct management of pregnant cows in the four weeks leading up to calving and the four weeks post-calving is critically important. Understanding the metabolic changes during this transition time will enable farmers to make sound decisions regarding transition cow management. Farmers should aim to feed a transition diet for a full three weeks before calving. There are five main aims of an effective pre-calving transition diet:

1. Meet the cow's increasing demand for energy and protein;
2. Maintain dry matter intake/minimising the decline in feed intake as calving approaches;
3. Adapt the cow's rumen to the post-calving diet;
4. Minimise the risk of milk fever and other health problems;
5. Minimise body condition loss and the risk of ketosis and fatty liver.

Milk fever which is caused by inadequate blood calcium causes a cascade of problems within the cow's body related to reduced smooth muscle function, and depression of the cow's immune system. Reduced smooth muscle function causes problems with rumen and gastro-intestinal tract motility, uterine motility and teat sphincter contraction. Compromised immune function causes an increase in problems such as; retained foetal membranes, metritis, mastitis and compromised fertility.



Veterinary students from James Cook University at the Low Stress Calving Workshop in Far North Qld.

For more information about this topic, contact your Regional Extension Coordinator for a copy of Dairy Australia's 'An Introduction to Transition Cow Management'.