parklands VETERINARY GROUP
Large Animal Services

vetPartners

Farm Newsletter

August 2026

Heat Stress Mitigation

Hot weather presents a range of challenges for dairy producers. Heat-stressed cows eat less, produce less milk, have reduced immune function, higher somatic cell counts (SCC), and poorer fertility. They also spend more time standing and less time lying down. A cow's core body temperature rises while lying down, therefore standing helps dissipate heat and lowers body temperature. As a result, an increased proportion of cows standing is another useful indicator of heat stress. Spikes in lameness often follow periods of hot weather. Early signs of heat stress include:

- Increased standing behaviour
- Seeking shade
- Faster breathing or panting
- Bunching around water sources

Open-mouth panting is a sign of more severe heat stress and requires immediate attention. One of the easiest ways to assess heat stress is by monitoring respiration rate. A useful rule of thumb is **60 breaths per minute** (approximately one breath per second). If at least 25% of the cows in a group are breathing at this rate or faster, they are struggling to cope with the heat and additional cooling measures are needed.

Ventilation: Effective ventilation is essential for reducing heat stress. Ventilation refers to the exchange of stale air with fresh air, which is important not only for cooling cattle but also for maintaining good respiratory health for both animals and people working in the shed. During summer, the target ventilation rate is **40– 60 air changes per hour**, while **4–8 air changes per hour** is generally sufficient during winter.

Cooling in Collecting Yards: Collecting areas can be among the hottest locations on the farm due to limited natural ventilation. However, they also provide a cost effective chance to cool cows before milking. Installing fans to deliver high-velocity airflow onto the cows can significantly improve cooling. However, in enclosed spaces, air can quickly become hot and humid if it is continuously recirculated. For maximum cooling efficiency, high-speed airflow should be combined with soaker systems. Farm staff also need to be mindful to minimize tight bunching to maximise the body surface area of the cows being exposed.: **Prioritising Resting Time**

Adequate lying time is essential for cow comfort and productivity. Cows should spend at least half of each day lying down. During hot weather, providing high air speeds over the lying areas is particularly important, helping cows remain cool while resting without sacrificing lying time.

Cows at Grass: When managing cows in pasture-based systems during hot weather, consider:

- Providing a plentiful supply of clean, cool drinking water.
- Ensure access to shade through trees, portable structures, or farm buildings.
- Minimise handling and movement, particularly during the hottest part of the day.
- Consider supplementary feeding where appropriate to help maintain feed intakes.

All Age Groups Can Benefit from Cooling

Lactating cows produce approximately twice as much metabolic heat as non-lactating animals, making them especially vulnerable to heat stress. However, cattle of all ages are affected by high temperatures. Research has shown that calves born to heat stressed dams often have poorer health, reduced survival rates, and lower lifetime performance. Providing effective heat abatement for pregnant cows and heifers, calves and growing heifers should not be overlooked.

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Flies

The hot weather has really helped the fly population and there are numerous reports of summer mastitis occurring recently and serious irritation in the parlour. I have been in many livestock houses and most are "black" with flies at the moment. It is uncomfortable for us to work in these conditions so imagine how the animals feel being bitten all day, the flies are also an important way of spreading disease especially scour, mastitis and pink eye.

As well as pour ons for the control of flies on the animal many farms need to take a multi pronged approach and attack the flies on the housing and prevent breeding in the tanks.
One product which comes as granules, but is made up with water and painted or sprayed onto walls is an option. Another is designed for use in the slurry tanks where it kills the tiny fly larvae before they hatch into flies.
For more information contact a Parklands vet.

Summer Mastitis

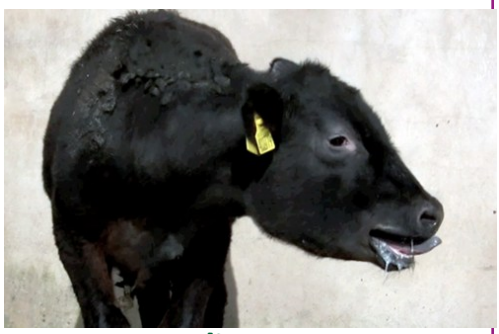
If you are having problems with cows getting mastitis in the first month of lactation (more than 1 in 12 cows) and/or high cell counts at the first milk recording (more than 10%), it is likely that there are environmental infections getting into the udder during the dry period. Whilst we tend to associate such infections with indoor calving management, outdoor calving cows can have similar (if not worse) conditions. The vagaries of the summer weather do not help along with the flies!
Options to consider for control of Summer Mastitis:

- Use internal teat sealants at drying off, although they may not work in the face of overwhelming environmental contamination!
- Consider using external teat sealants in heifers.
- Keep areas around feed and water troughs as clean as practical. Move feed troughs regularly to reduce poaching, and stop cows lying in warm spoiled waste food.
- Any pasture grazed by dry cows should be used for a maximum of 2 weeks, followed by at least 4 weeks rest to reduce bacteria levels.

Summer mastitis and mastitis in the months just after calving is due to poor protection of the cow in her dry period.
Speak to a Parklands vet for more information.

** Lungworm Alert **

We are seeing increasing numbers of lungworm at grass. Do not take any chances with this disease as it can quickly turn into casualties! It may be the wetter winter and recent heat has caused an explosion, whatever the reason please check the cattle carefully and contact a Parklands vet if you suspect any problems.
There has been reports of wormers not working as well as they used to so bear this in mind if you have problems. There have been cases recently where calves have been dosed within the last few weeks but still are dying of lungworm. If you suspect this may be about to happen on your farm then speak to us as the choice of wormer is important in the face of a challenge. First season grazers are especially prone to lungworm and especially if batches of calves always go out onto the same paddock or field as each successive batch multiplies up the amount of contamination on the field and disease can then be much quicker to strike.



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