



VET notes

YOUR TOTALLY VETS NEWSLETTER ALL ABOUT ANIMALS ON YOUR FARM

MAY 2011



Totally Vets Golf Competition winners, from left to right: Gretchen Brown, Sam Waugh (looking for a congratulatory kiss perhaps?) and Garry Simpson

Golf Day

The Totally Vets golf competition on 14th March went very well again this year, with good weather and a great turnout. As the snapshot shows, our clients Gretchen Brown, Sam Waugh and Garry Simpson were delighted with their win!

Only in its second year, the enjoyment of the competition means we plan to make it a regular slot on the Totally Vets calendar. It is a great opportunity for our staff and clients to relax and have some fun.

Thanks once again to all our sponsors for their time and contribution to the event.

Rotavirus vaccination: it's all in the timing

Paul Wiseman

Timing, they say, is everything. Linda and Sean McGinty found to their cost that when it comes to protecting calves against the debilitating effects of rotavirus, this well-worn saying has special meaning.

When they took over their Cheltenham dairy farm in 2004, they were told that rotavirus had been a problem on the farm, so took the precaution of vaccinating their pregnant cows each year with Rotavec® Corona.

The programme was working well, but in 2009, Linda says, the task was delayed. Cows were vaccinated only a few days before the planned start of calving and it wasn't long before rotavirus scours started to break out among the newborn calves.

In all, about 50 calves from the 650-cow spring-calving herd were affected (there are also 150 autumn calvers on the farm). Three calves had to be put down. The outbreak

was a problem they could have done without during a typically busy spring calving.

"The later calvers weren't affected," Linda says. "These ones had more like the recommended interval between vaccination and calving. It just reinforced to us how well the vaccine works when it's administered at the right time."

The scours outbreak was a rare glitch for the couple, who take animal health planning very seriously. They came into the dairy industry in 1992 as 'ex-townies' sharing a love of farming. Beginning as 50:50 sharemilkers, they set out a plan of what they wanted to achieve and have made big strides in a relatively short time.

Their 250-hectare Cheltenham farm is supported by a 250ha run-off at Kimbolton. It is set up as an equity partnership with a contract milker. The McGintys have another 170ha farm with a lower order sharemilker at Bulls, running a 550-cow spring-calving herd and supported by a separate 170ha run-off at Kimbolton.

Article continues onto page 2





Totally Vets current stock health

Facial eczema (FE) seems to have been more of an event and wider spread through the district than previous years. Although a good dollop of rain and grass minimum temperatures tracking below 12°C can slow fungal growth, older spores can persist for some time. High-risk properties should continue to spore-count until levels fall. A number of tail-end ewes, cows that fail to gain condition in the midst of plenty and poor performing young stock may be showing the

long term effects of FE. A simple blood test on these animals can implicate or remove FE as a reason for the ill-thrift.

Prolonged use of zinc salts for FE prevention will deplete liver copper reserves. If you haven't already done so, check the mineral status of stock before winter advances too far. Allow yourself time to rectify deficiencies before the critical spring. Liver biopsies are a relatively straightforward procedure to carry out on farm



HA HA Five best golf caddy remarks

Golfer: 'Think I'm going to drown myself in the lake.'

Caddy: 'Think you can keep your head down that long?'

Golfer: 'I'd move heaven and earth to break 100 on this course.'

Caddy: 'Try heaven, you've already moved most of the earth.'

Golfer: 'Do you think my game is improving?'

Caddy: 'Yes sir, you miss the ball much closer now.'

Golfer: 'Do you think I can get there with a 5 iron?'

Caddy: 'Eventually.'

Golfer: 'You've got to be the worst caddy in the world.'

Caddy: 'I don't think so Sir. That would be too much of a coincidence.'



Above: Sean & Linda McGinty

Article continued from page 1

Linda says that until the 2009 outbreak, the only time they had experienced rotavirus was during their first season as sharemilkers.

This happened before a rotavirus vaccine was available and, combined with an outbreak of salmonellosis, the disease had their calves "dropping like flies".

Rotavirus is not the only disease challenge on the Kimbolton farm, she adds. Bovine virus diarrhoea (BVD) is also present on the property, but a vaccination programme with Bovilis® BVD set up in consultation with Totally Vets "works a treat".

The couple have recently upgraded their calf-rearing sheds and have a carefully planned calf-rearing policy that applies to both farms. This includes close attention to colostrum management, an essential part of a rotavirus vaccination programme.

"It is my policy to feed the newborn calves with colostrum from the *first* milking from a cow," Linda notes. "This has the highest levels of antibodies and 'goodness'. Antibodies drop markedly after subsequent milkings. When we bring in the calved cows, these get milked separately from the other colostrum cows and the milk gets stored separately for this reason. From talking to other farmers, I understand we are unusual in doing this - it isn't normal practice."

She says that notwithstanding the hiccup that occurred when the vaccination was left too late, their colostrum management is one reason why they have so few sick calves.

And after last year's experience, the "vaccination timing" aspect of the rearing policy will receive special attention, Linda concludes.

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and are a much better measure of an animal's true copper status than blood tests.

In recent weeks we have seen a number of cases of respiratory disease in R1 and R2 beef animals, often affecting more than one animal in a mob. Affected animals may appear 'bloated'. In a number of these cases, animals have been suffering from worms as well. Don't extend drench intervals in R1s at the moment unless on really clean feed.

Sheep

Winter ewe management is helped by scanning ewes. Scanning provides

information that can be put to profitable use in targeting winter feed and lambing paddocks to your most productive sheep. Before this though, identifying the lightest ewes in the flock and giving them a drench (long acting? Ask us) and preferential feed when you take the ram out can improve their chances of getting to weaning with a lamb or two at foot. Body condition score (BCS) is a key productivity driver. Vaccinations and pre-lamb drenching, if required, should be planned to minimise time off feed. Totally Vets provide independent condition-scoring services for both ewes and cows. We can also scan your ewes.

Deer

Plan hind-scanning now.

Dairy

Monitor growth rates and BCS of your R1s and R2s. Poor performance can have multiple causes. Building BCS of the herd is a primary task. Milking on into May at a high payout can have fish hooks; in particular milking body condition off that cannot be replaced during what becomes a shorter dry period. Also be wary of dry cow antibiotic withholding times when treating cows with a short dry period.

Rearing calves - 0 to 4 days

Emma Scott

Calf rearers are responsible for the future generations of cows and they should have pride in the valuable role they are performing. Throughout the rearing period, planning can greatly reduce stress on the staff and on the calves. Consistency in the calf-rearing shed helps identify any problems quickly as they show up as different from the routine.

Calf rearers are responsible for the future generations of cows and they should have pride in the valuable role they are performing. Throughout the rearing period, planning can greatly reduce stress on the staff and on the calves. Consistency in the calf-rearing shed helps identify any problems quickly as they show up as different from the routine.

Quality colostrum is the key. Cows that calve in BCS 5 (heifers 5.5) produce higher-quality colostrum. The quality of colostrum is also influenced by the transition diet management, metabolic management, trace mineral status and availability of farm staff to check on springing cows regularly to reduce calving difficulties.

By 24 hours after calving, antibody levels in colostrum have fallen to less than 25% of their level at calving. Calves are born with almost no immunity and their ability to absorb antibodies from colostrum declines to zero by 24 hours of age. This is the reason for feeding calves 2-2.5 litres of 12-hour colostrum within 6-12 hours of birth.

Twice-daily calf removal should occur during the calving season. This reduces mastitis in heifers and cows and ensures adequate colostrum intake in calves in the first 6-12 hours of life. Calves left on cows for more than 12 hours have a high rate of failure of passive transfer of antibodies and are therefore at high risk of disease, ill-thrift and mortality. Fifty percent of calves fail to receive adequate colostrum when left on the cow for 24 hours.

Clean trailers with a good virucidal disinfectant after every pick-up. The aim is five calves per pen on the trailer, with a maximum of 10 calves per pen. Drive slowly!!!!

Dry and draught-free are important words. Ideally the shed is twice as deep as high or wide to prevent draughts at the back of the shed. Suitable bedding such as bark chips, untreated sawdust/shavings 200-300mm deep should be topped up regularly as needed. The minimum space per calf is 1.5m². Pens should group a minimum of 10 calves, 20 at the most. Each shed should house a maximum of 100 calves. Keep calves as far away as possible from older animals on the farm.

Calves should be allocated to a pen when they first arrive in the shed and then stay in this pen the entire indoor-rearing time. Calves housed for the first 3 weeks and sheltered calves have shown a 20% increase in growth rates. Pens need good overhead air flow.

The floor should drain from back to front. A suggestion is a coil drain placed in pea-metal under the bedding to remove effluent and water and prevent pooling. There should be no free-lying water, mud, drains, swamp or cowshed effluent near the calf-rearing sheds.

Strategies for successful calf-rearing and reducing early season mastitis go hand-in-hand. Totally Vets can help you design strategies that work for you.





Heifer mastitis

Craig Dickson

Your heifers are the future of your herd and you have invested considerable money and time before they enter the milking herd. The quickest way to devalue this investment is calving mastitis, which often leaves heifers with light quarters, and complicates their first few days in the shed. Heifers that develop mastitis are also more likely to be culled early.

Heifer mastitis traditionally occurs within seven days after calving when udders can be oedematous (swollen), and the teats open and dripping milk. These factors, along with others, mean the udder is much more

susceptible to infection with environmental bacteria such as *Streptococcus uberis*.

The cost of this mastitis was measured in a recent New Zealand study which found each case of heifer mastitis costs \$197 when calculated using a \$5.50 payout¹. This means that with a payout of \$7.90, each heifer with mastitis will cost you well over \$200! This cost takes into account the treatment cost, labour for treatment, milk discard and culling.

There are a few ways you can reduce the amount of mastitis in your heifers. Management tools such as twice-daily removal and milking of heifers from calving mob have been shown to reduce clinical mastitis by 45%. You can also reduce heifer mastitis by approximately 70% through using Teatseal 4-6 weeks pre-calving. With such a dramatic reduction in costly mastitis cases, the Teatseal treatment of all heifers quickly pays for itself. We have a cost-benefit calculator available to work out the return on investment on your farm.

Dealing with the issue before calving by treating heifers with Teatseal also means a smoother run during calving when time is always at a premium. It also gives your heifers the best chance to remain uninfected as they enter the milking herd, so they produce to capacity and have a lower chance of getting culled.

Teatsealing heifers pre-calving is a surprisingly achievable job, especially when performed by our experienced team. It bears no resemblance to the heifer in pain with mastitis being treated during milking. Farms that have already tried Teatsealing heifers are repeating the treatment year after year in their first calvers.

Our heifer Teatseal team will be starting to treat heifer mobs over the next few weeks. To investigate the cost benefit on your farm or ask any further questions, please contact one of Totally Vets dairy team.

1. Compton C and McDougall S. Economics of mastitis in dairy heifers. Report for dairy NZ and SFF, June 2009.

What's the goss?

Big congratulations go to **Emma** and **Jed Cooper** for the birth of their daughter **Pippa Maisie**, 8lb15oz, born on 1st April, and to **Michelle Humphrey** and **Adam O'Fee** who had their baby boy **Keane**, 9lb10oz, on 9th April. We wish both couples lots of happy times ahead.

On the subject of babies, our **Julie** from the Palmerston branch will be leaving on 27th May for a year's maternity leave - we wish her all the best with her baby to come. We welcome **Philippa Stewart**, who joins us as a technician, primarily focused on the sheep and beef extension team.

In the small animal hospital, welcome to vet nurse **Alicia McClenaghan** who will be working our late nights on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. **Kayla**, a very familiar face at the Feilding reception and at puppy preschool, has moved from reception to the hospital, where she will be using her nursing skills full-time. This is to replace **Kristen**, who is sadly leaving us at Easter. We are delighted to have **Fenella Atkins** on board, who has replaced her sister **Imogen** as a kennel girl.

The fishing competition on the 9th April went really well, especially for Wanganui-first-time-fisherman **Stephen Barr**, who successfully caught 14 sharks, with not even a teeny weeny gurnard in sight! **Guy** and **Barny** had a great start with an early-morning detour to the boat mechanic after Guy's boat broke down 100m from the boat ramp. Thanks to **Bruce**

"Bruiser" Callon for towing them back - one hour and \$70 later, they were back on the water.

Well done to winner **Jason Smith**, with his 4.54kg snapper. Other category winners included **Kevin Grundy** - 1.02kg gurnard, **Sean McGinty** - 2.78kg kowhai, **Trevor Low** - 0.86kg terakihi and **Ross Humphrey** - 1.8kg blue cod. **Aaron Taylor** also won the Turner's sports raffle. Thanks once again to all the sponsors who contributed to the event to make it so successful.

Our apologies for a misprint last month: the cowbells and whistles for Relay for Life were kindly donated by **Dion Smith** from Stockguard, not **Glenda**. Our sincere thanks for those - it's amazing how they keep you going!

The Manawatu Monitor Farm Annual Seminar

Greta Baynes

The Monitor Farm seminar in February was full of interesting concepts. Here are some of them.

BREEDING/FINISHING FARM UPDATE

- Simon & Dennis Wishnowsky

The weather continued to have a negative influence in 2010 but close attention and timely decision-making has had positive influence on the farm. On the sheep front, home-bred hogget mating is occurring and the breeding-ewe performance this year has been well above the district average. The keys to a successful cropping/regrassing programme have been planning, monitoring and reviewing. Intensive soil-testing allowed targeted nutrient application with optimal performance from specified paddocks and reduced fertiliser costs.

B+LNZ DISTRICT MONITORING

PROGRAMME - Ginny Dodunski

One lesson learned so far is that the higher-performing farms showed the greatest difference between cage and budget for most of the year; a smaller winter 'pinch'; higher total dry matter production; and a response to autumn-applied nitrogen that was both higher (kgDM/kgN) and more prolonged than standard budget figures.

The other lesson is that while it is important to efficiently utilise feed grown, it would appear more important to grow lots of it in the first

place! Regular district monitoring data is available. E-mail GretaMMF@totallyvets.co.nz to receive this information.

AUTUMN WEATHER UPDATE

- Bob McDavitt, MetService

This season, La Niña has dominated the summer and early autumn. With La Niña, the sea surface temperature across the equatorial Eastern Central Pacific Ocean is lower than normal which pushes the subtropical ridge south. We get more 'tropical' weather in the north of the country, including rainstorms, but it also pushes more anticyclones onto the central region of the country, and the Manawatu is frequently drier than we would like! La Niña is expected to fade during autumn but beyond that, it is hard to predict.

OVATION - OVINE INNOVATION!

The ideal product: the perfect lamb is 18kgCW (best for restaurant-cut size), 10mm GR, well-muscled hind-quarters and loins and has similar mates turning up one week at a time for an entire year.

On-farm practices that influence product quality are:

- shearing (reduces microbial load on meat)
- minimising stress around trucking time
- minimal trucking
- good nutrition

FarmIQ - Collier Isaacs

FarmIQ is a collaboration between Silver Fern Farms, PGG Wrightson, and Landcorp that aims to create:

- 'A demand-driven integrated value chain for red meat that delivers sustainable benefits to all participants'
- 'A market-led approach that responds to consumer needs through a 'plate to pasture' integrated value chain'

In its initial stages, FarmIQ is an information-gathering exercise:

- On our international meat consumers
- On how to better define the end product
- On meat-processing facilities: assessing internal systems, as well as carcass information that can be fed back to producers
- On the performance of various farm system components: genetics, forage types, management systems

This information will be used to improve linkages between farms (farm systems, genetics), the processing sector, and the market. The hope is that by better connecting consumer needs to farmer supply, all players in the production chain will make more money.

For more information go to www.farmiq.co.nz

HEALTHY THINKING - Dr Tom Mulholland

Dr Tom, a motivational speaker known as the Attitude Doctor, delivered messages including 'It is not what happens to you that is important, it is your attitude towards it that counts'.

It is possible to change the way you think.

Think carefully about your expectations, do not expect too much. If things do not go to plan, the 'grumpy centre' will be activated, releasing cortisol which increases the risk of strokes, Alzheimer's, altered decision-making, heart attacks, stomach ulcers, diabetes and increases blood pressure while suppressing the immune system.

We have a choice to think and act differently.

For more in-depth information on the Manawatu Monitor Farm Annual Seminar, go to www.totallyvets.co.nz/monitor-farms.html





The Wishnowsky Monitor Farm

Greta Baynes

A challenging season continues with the farm producing 7.3T DM/ha this season. The stocking rate has dropped nearly 2su/ha, driven mainly by a reduction in finishing stock to protect the breeding stock as much as possible.

SHEEP

New to the property this season are 360 home-bred hoggets that will be mated on May 1st to rams of similar genetics, minimising the hybrid vigour effect on birthweight. Only those more than 40kg will be bred. Teaser rams were introduced exactly 17 days before 1st May, at 1:100.

The ewes have an average body-condition score (BCS) of 2.6 which is great for the season and they have gained at least 1 BCS

since weaning. Ideally all ewes would be >BCS 3 at mating and lambing - a rare achievement!

CATTLE

The MA cows were pregnancy-tested with variable results (discussed at next meeting) in late March in time to identify late calvers to send away grazing. They were weaned in mid-April with the majority of calves sold. Replacement Limousin heifers and some lighter calves will be carried through the winter.

The Wishnowsky Monitor Farm continues to provide an opportunity for farmers to pick up handy hints they can use on their farm.

PASTURE COVER ASSESSMENT

- John Brier, Farmax

Farmax has designed a pasture sward stick that has been calibrated to sheep and beef pasture. Farmax has shown that measuring the average cover in 40-50% of the paddocks on the farm, with six measures per paddock, consistently gives an average cover within 100kgDM/ha of the 'true' average cover. Come to the next day at Wishnowsky's to learn how to put this information into a simple feed budget that you can do on the back of an envelope!

SHEEP REPRODUCTIVE VACCINES

- Roger Marchant, Intervet Schering Plough

Over 40% of farms have had a toxoplasmosis abortion outbreak with 100% of farms and 80% of mixed-aged ewes exposed to this disease. However, at mating most hoggets are still naïve but they require only one vaccine dose for life, best given well before mating.

Eighty percent of farms have been exposed to *Campylobacter*. Data clearly show farms where hoggets are vaccinated for both toxoplasmosis and *Campylobacter* have better scanning percentages than unvaccinated flocks.

MANAGING SOIL FERTILITY IN TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES

- Alec MacKay, AgResearch

AgResearch is running a long-term farmlet study with differing fertiliser inputs. One farmlet received 625kg superphosphate per year from 1975 to 1980, then 375kg/year until 2010 (plus lime as necessary). Olsen P is now 55. The other farmlet received 125kg superphosphate each year, with a current Olsen P of 11.

While an Olsen P of 55 is unnecessary, 20-30 on hill country is ideal because it will prolong autumn growth, encourage earlier spring growth, improve pasture species and therefore quality and palatability, encourage even grazing and allow higher stocking rates.

Nitrate poisoning

Leisa Spring-Norris

Nitrate poisoning threatens both the cow and her unborn calf. Nitrate only becomes a health risk when plant levels become extreme (>2.0 g nitrate/kg dry matter). The risk of nitrate poisoning can be managed.

Reducing risk factors

The best approach is not to feed high-risk feeds until nitrate levels decline. In reality, by following some basic principles you can minimise the risk.

1. Feeding risk factors:

- Don't put hungry stock on a high-risk crop. Fill them up first with hay or grass.
- Provide a shallow break that is long across the face so all animals have access.

This controls the amount and rate at which feed is eaten.

- The greatest risk is in the first few days of feeding, so introduce stock gradually over 7-10 days.

2. Plant risk factors:

- Rapidly-growing forage and fodder crops can accumulate excess nitrate. Allow the crop to mature but feed before flowering.

Copper deficiency

Greta Baynes

Low copper levels can limit growth rates, reproductive performance and lactation.

HOW DOES COPPER DEFICIENCY AFFECT AN ANIMAL?

In cattle, copper deficiency can cause reduced growth rates in young cattle, diarrhoea, bone defects, lightening of the coat colour especially around the eyes, anaemia and possibly reduced milk production and poor reproductive performance.

Young deer suffer reduced growth rates and adult deer develop a condition called 'swayback' where they lose coordination of their hind end. Lambs can also suffer from swayback. Copper deficiency in sheep will also lead to weak bones, wool abnormalities and possibly reduced fertility.

The classic signs of copper deficiency are not as common these days and most of the time we are aiming to achieve levels that optimise production.

WHAT CAUSES COPPER DEFICIENCY?

The reason for inadequate copper levels is usually due to interfering minerals in the soil/pasture and not low levels of copper in the diet per se. Minerals that reduce the absorption

of copper (antagonists) include molybdenum, sulphur, iron and zinc. Antagonists have a large influence on the amount of copper that must be present in the diet to maintain optimal levels.

WHEN DO COPPER LEVELS NORMALLY DROP?

Copper levels tend to fall over the winter and are often at their lowest heading into the spring. The reasons for this are:

- Pasture molybdenum levels increase in water-logged soils
- During the winter the amount of soil, and hence iron, ingested by animals increases (it can be up to 10% of the diet if grazing short muddy pastures, if silage has a lot of soil contamination or if the water table is high)
- Copper requirements are higher during the late winter/early spring due to the demands of the developing foetus and early lactation

Autumn is a good time of the year to test trace element levels.

WHY IS LIVER-TESTING BETTER THAN BLOOD-TESTING FOR COPPER?

Liver samples are preferred to blood samples for assessing copper status. The liver is the major storage site of copper in the body. Think of the liver as being like a water tank slowly feeding a trough (the blood). The trough remains full until the tank is empty and then the trough level also falls. Blood-testing will identify clinical deficiency but does not give any indication of the level of copper reserves in the liver. Generally we are not looking for

clinical deficiency but want to know whether there is enough copper reserve to get through the next period of time and how effective the supplementation programme has been.

Liver samples can be collected from animals going to the works. Simply call us in advance to organise the form that must accompany the animals. Alternatively, we can come out and perform a simple procedure on live animals to collect liver samples. If necessary, we can take blood samples, but as mentioned, this does not give us an accurate indication if copper levels will limit productivity in the upcoming season.

It is best to test mixed-age animals as copper levels are depleted during pregnancy and lactation. These animals are likely to have the lowest levels in the herd so will give the best indication of the optimal level of copper supplementation.

HOW CAN COPPER BE SUPPLEMENTED?

There are a variety of ways to supplement including copper boluses, injections or copper added to the water supply.

It is vital to measure copper levels and not treat without diagnosis as copper can be toxic, and indeed fatal if overdosed.

Now is a good time to test, as levels will drop over winter and are at their lowest in the pasture in spring when the demands of late pregnancy and lactation are at their greatest. Speak to your vet about testing and supplementing on your farm to minimise performance losses from low copper levels.



- Grazing level of plant. Nitrate levels tend to be higher in the lowest third of the stalk.
 - The first grazing of newly-sown perennial ryegrasses, short-rotation ryegrasses, forage crops, and brassica crops may be particularly dangerous.
3. Environmental risk factors that may increase plant uptake of nitrate are:

- Drought stress - unlikely to be an issue this year.
 - Reduced photosynthesis following temperatures <12°C, plant damage (frost or disease), and cloudy days.
 - Nitrogen fertiliser, particularly if plant growth is limited by other factors, such as drought or low temperatures.
4. Ensure stock always have access to fresh, clean water.

5. MONITOR STOCK! Symptoms of nitrate poisoning will show within an hour or two of eating excess toxic feed. Look for increased salivation, pain, diarrhoea, muscle tremors, and open-mouth breathing and sudden death.

At first sign of any trouble, remove animals from suspect feed quickly and QUIETLY. Offer good quality hay or silage, and call Totally Vets.

Pregnancy-scanning sheep

Guy Haynes

Once again, it is time for farmers to consider pregnancy-testing their sheep.

Both our experienced operators are able to take on a small number of new clients this season.

What's different from last year? The considerable increase in the price of dry ewes and new season lambs.

What's the same as last year? The cost of scanning.

We encourage those clients who are not scanning to look seriously at the advantages to be gained and to contact one of our operators below for a no-obligation discussion.

Advantages of scanning include:

- Quit non-productive dry ewes early while prices are high and conserve valuable feed for productive animals
- Priority-feed ewes carrying multiples to avoid metabolic disorders and improve birth weights and ewe lactation, thus maximizing lamb survival
- Ensure multiple-bearing ewes are lambing down in what are traditionally the best docking paddocks on the farm to enhance lamb survival and minimise mis-mothering
- Single-bearing ewes can be relegated to more difficult areas of the farm

All of this can result in substantial increases in docking percentages.

We would be happy to discuss your individual requirements and the services we can offer. For more information without obligation, please contact Totally Vets on 06 323 6161, Ross Edwards on 0274 402 032 or Guy Haynes on 0274 555 424.



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