



Feed Them Right: getting the most out of your hardest workers

The New Zealand working dog must be one of the biggest assets on any farm. In fact a good dog probably is worth their weight in gold, working tirelessly day after day, often covering hundreds of kilometers over rugged country in all weather. They can go where no machinery can, at greater speed and agility than any bike. Just try and imagine doing anything without them. The last thing we should be doing is feeding them rubbish however anecdotally up to 50% of the NZ working dog population live in a state of mild, chronic undernourishment. The diet we chose for them must provide them with everything they need. If we fail we must be prepared to face the consequences of a lack of energy, increased injury, poor condition and a lack of concentration. We must recognize that our working dogs are the endurance athletes of the canine world and treat them accordingly.

Dogs are omnivores like us and are able to eat a wide variety of meat and vegetable products to provide the energy, proteins, vitamins and minerals needed. Not all sources are created equal however with many of the budget dog foods relying heavily on cereal by-products which are actually poorly digestible and primarily simply pass straight through into the faeces. Meat and bone meal may make up a high proportion which simply can not provide all of the energy and protein required by our canine workers. Energy density, the amount of energy per kg of food, is another consideration as farm dogs need at least 2-3 times

more calories that if they weren't in work. Cereals contain little fat or protein and so are not very energy dense. This translates into the need to feed a much larger amount to satisfy your dogs energy requirements, so much in fact that your dog may not physically be able to eat it in a single sitting. A large meal will also take much longer to digest with a lot of the bodies blood directed to the intestines rather than muscles.

All things considered an ideal working dog diet should be high in good quality protein and energy, completely balanced with all of the required vitamins and minerals, easily digestible and of course not cost too much. Premium diets, such as Eukanuba Premium Performance, are scientifically formulated and proven in clinical trials to meet these criteria and so represent the best option for feeding New Zealands working dog population. The price per bag may appear more pricey but once you work out how many meals it contains, many more than the same weight bag of reduced quality diets, the true value is easy to see.

If you want the best from your dogs you need to give them the best. Just try a bag of premium diet and within a few weeks you will notice improved body and coat condition and, more importantly, an ability to work harder for longer with their performance boosted by up to 50%. Buy online from MyPetshop.co.nz and make life easier for you and your dog.

Constipation in Working Dogs

Most of us would not generally consider constipation to be a serious matter. Chronic constipation in working dogs however is a very genuine problem that results in a real loss of productivity in both the short and long term. Once affected, there is a risk that the condition will recur with megacolon developing as a result. This is when the final part of the bowel becomes grossly dilated and is no longer able to contract, resulting in faecal impaction that is very difficult to treat successfully in working dogs while maintaining their required level of activity. Studies have shown that farm dogs are 4 times more likely to suffer this condition than the pet population and entire males are those at greatest risk. This leads us to question why this is the case and what can be done to treat and, more importantly, prevent constipation from occurring.

Constipation is not a disease in itself. Instead it is most often a result of two main factors:

1. Prostatic Disease: an enlarged prostate (most often known as benign prostatic hyperplasia) is a direct result of male hormones and causes a narrowing of the colon.
2. Inappropriate Nutrition: swallowing bone fragments or feeding a very high or low fibre diet will put animals at risk through an

increased risk of faecal impaction and impaired intestinal motility.

If undetected or untreated, constipation can progress to a stage where the dog will need hospitalisation, intravenous fluids, an anaesthetic and manual evacuation the vet clinic. This is often followed by castration. Not only can this prove costly, your dog will also be unable to work effectively for at least a couple of weeks. Prevention is obviously far preferable and following a few simple steps can dramatically reduce the risk of this important condition:

1. Do not feed bones or, if this is not possible, do not allow the dogs to swallow bone fragments
2. Feed a good quality diet designed especially for high performance animals
3. Close monitoring on farm and early treatment with stool softeners such as liquid paraffin if suspected
4. Castration, a measure that becomes increasingly important with age.

Do not underestimate the problem of constipation in your farm dogs. It is probably more common than you think but with a little thought the risk to your farm dogs can really be reduced.

A Word of Warning.....

At the vet clinic we see all kinds of emergencies, the most frequent being dogs that have been hit by cars. Unfortunately it seems that rural dogs living on farm are far more likely to suffer this fate. At best they escape with a few cuts and bruises but often a broken bone or two are involved. Even the most simple fracture can end up being quite expensive to treat and really complicated breaks may even need referral to a specialist surgeon (at specialist prices). So next time you are reversing the truck or running your dog by the car a little extra care could prevent a serious injury to your faithful companion.