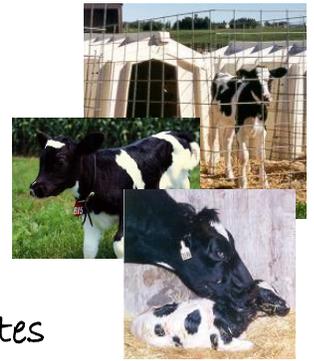


Calving Ease

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Spring Slip-ups in Calf Care

- Not enough to eat
- Not enough coccidiostat consumed
- Not enough clean, dry bedding
- Not chilling colostrum quickly enough
- Not using effective cleaning procedures

The combined effect of these five slip-ups along with widely fluctuating spring temperatures, and often, wet muddy conditions is an increase in the rate of treatable scours and respiratory illness. So, what can we do to avoid these slip-ups and have healthier calves?

Feeding

The more temperatures remain below 60 degrees, the greater the amount of energy from feed that is used to maintain the calf's core body temperature of 102 degrees. Keep feeding at your winter rates until you can consistently go out in the morning to feed calves without a sweatshirt. Recall the rule of thumb of feeding 1 percent more for each degree below 60 degrees.

For example, for an average daily temperature of 40 degrees, the feeding rate should be up 20 percent over the summer feeding program. If you feed 5 quarts of whole milk a day in the summer then spring feeding should be 6 quarts. If you feed 24 ounces of milk replacer powder in the summer then spring feeding should be about 29-30 ounces. To access tables for whole milk and various milk replacers that show estimated daily gains at selected feeding rates go to www.atticacows.com. Select Calf Facts in the left-hand menu – click on EstGainPreweanCalves. The entry looks like this: 20-20MR90@604020 and means that for a 20-20 milk replacer fed to a 90 pound calf the gains are estimated at 60F, 40F and 20F. Similar tables for whole milk are at the bottom of this list.

Coccidiostat

Spring weather is often stressful for young calves. My rule of thumb for severe temperature change stress is anything over 30 degrees difference in 24 hours. The greater the amount of weather stress the greater the degree of immunosuppression. The calves cannot fight off “bugs” that they normally would shrug off. Often, one of the consequences of these spring changes is an outbreak of coccidiosis.

The amount of coccidiostat being consumed would normally control coccidia growth. Given extra stress, the coccidia are allowed to grow too rapidly and overwhelm the medication. If a coccidiostat is not fed regularly as part of the liquid feed ration (milk), it may be necessary

during the spring to add it to the milk or milk replacer. Or, increasing the rate at which the coccidiostat is added to the calf starter grain may help.

An excellent technical primer on coccidiosis may be found at <http://calfnotes.com>, click on Calf Note #17. At the same web site Calf Note #32 discusses coccidiostats in calf starter grains.

Bedding

Regardless that the first day of spring is March 20, in much of the United States it is still cold. At least, newborn calves consider it cold – recall that any conditions below 60 degrees cause these calves to burn body reserves to maintain their core body temperature. Keep up winter-time bedding routines. When you can go out to do calf chores in the morning without a sweatshirt, then you can start following summer bedding routines.

Cool Colostrum Rapidly

During winter months we often depend on snow banks and ice to chill our colostrum. Well, spring is here. Snow is not dependable. Milk houses are not just above freezing. It is time to plan on rapid chilling using ice. Either an ice bath or ice containers in the colostrum will work. Recall that our goal is to chill fresh colostrum to at least 60 degrees within 30 minutes after it is collected from the fresh cow.

Placing buckets or bottles of warm colostrum directly into either a refrigerator or freezer will not chill the colostrum rapidly enough to prevent undesirable bacteria growth. This method does not work! Pre-chilling and then refrigerating or freezing does slow down the multiplication rate for bacteria. Feed clean colostrum, not bacteria soup.

Cleaning Equipment

With spring comes outside work. Work on buildings. Hauling manure. Preparing for planting. It is easy to skip cleaning or at least cut corners. When it comes to preventing biofilms on feeding equipment we cannot skip cleaning. Every piece of equipment every feeding needs to be rinsed and washed – no cheating.

Once a protein film gets a chance to bond to a bucket, bottle, nipple, tube feeder, or milker pail the next time we use one of them protein is more likely to “stick on.” Biofilms, the homes of bacteria, are truly like a row of dominos – once they start they increase in both diameter and thickness every feeding. Plan on the time to do a good job of washing all feeding equipment each feeding even when other spring tasks are beckoning.

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