

Giving Calves a Good Start

Troy Veterinary Clinic

March 5, 2014

Before Birth (Dry Cows) Protocol

- Must be in a clean, dry, comfortable place, and good access to feed
- Proper dry cow nutrition
 - Vitamins
 - Minerals
 - Energy
 - Protein
- Proper vaccinations

Calf health begins with the mother. Cows must be put on a dry cow program that addresses all her needs. This is more than dry cow minerals. She must have adequate energy, protein, minerals, vitamins, clean water, good air, a clean comfortable place to lie down, and plenty of bunk space.

Her nutritional needs are pretty easy to meet during the far off dry period. The last three weeks of the dry period require a denser diet in order to meet her requirements for energy, usable protein, trace mineral, and vitamins.

The cow also needs to be on a proper vaccination program ahead of her dry period so the colostrum she produces provides the protection the calf needs.

If we short the dry cow her calf is born deficient and starts life less able to deal with the stress and disease it will be faced with.

Calves should be born in a clean environment free of manure build up. The cow's manure carries most of the disease causing organisms that cause calf disease.

The cow's first milk should be harvested cleanly. She should be predipped and wiped in order to limit bacterial contamination. Milk pails, claws, and hoses need to be cleaned and sanitized between uses, just like your milk line to prevent bacterial growth that can sicken the calf.

The calf should receive a 8.0% of it body weight of clean colostrum within the first 4 hours of life. Holstein calves should receive 4 quarts of first milk while Jersey calves will receive 2 quarts. The remaining first milk should be put in 1 gallon zip lock bags and stored flat in the refrigerator so they can cool rapidly decreasing bacterial growth. The calf should receive another 2 quarts of this colostrum 6-8 hours later.

At Birth Protocol

- The calf should be born in a clean dry place free of manure
- Within the first 4 hours give colostrum
 - 4 quarts to Holsteins
 - 2 quarts to Jerseys
- Repeats feeding with 2 more quarts in 6-8 hours

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The calf should be dried off and moved to a clean well bedded spot, separated from other calves and cows so they can't pass disease to each other. Calf diseases are very contagious. Large numbers of *E. coli*, rota virus, corona virus, and cryptosporidia are shed in a scouring calves' diarrhea. They remain in this bedding, on walls, and floors; requiring a good clean up and dry out before putting a new calf in that spot. Sawdust, 3-4 inches deep, should cover the floor/ground. In cool weather straw or hay bedding should be fluffed up and deep enough for the calf to nest in it to conserve heat. Outside calves require calf coats when temperatures are below freezing.

The calf should be fed at least 10% of its body weight a day of whole milk or properly mixed milk replacer. A 100lb calf should receive at least 2 ½ quarts twice a day. More if the temperature is below 60F. Refer to the cold weather calf feeding handout available at our clinic or on our website.

Calves that scour should be fed their normal amount of milk twice a day. They should receive at least 4% of their normal body weight of a good electrolyte mid-day (100lb calf will receive 2 quarts). If the calf does not eat one of those meals use an esophageal feeder to get it into them. Calves that won't eat would probably benefit from 1 liter of lactated ringers Sub-Q in addition to oral electrolytes. Calves that won't stand up will probably require intravenous therapy. In cold weather scouring calves would likely benefit from added heat.

We may also recommend oral and/or systemic antibiotics. Most of these are extra label use or prescription products and must be prescribed by your veterinarian.

Bedding and Feeding Newborns

- Bedding area must be cleaned and dried before introducing a new newborn.
- Sawdust should be 3-4 inches deep
- In cool weather, use straw or hay in generous amounts for nesting to hold heat.
- Outside calves should also have calf coats in freezing temperatures.
- A calf should receive at least 10% of its body weight a day in milk (100lb calf should receive at least 2 ½ qt twice a day)

Treat Sick Calves

- Calves with Scours
 - Feed normal amount of milk twice daily
 - Feed 2 quarts per 100lbs of electrolytes mid-day
- Calves that are not eating
 - Tube calves to ensure they receive necessary nutrition
 - Give 1 liter lactated ringer sub-q
- Calves that cannot stand up
 - May require IV therapy

Specific Recommendations

