Moos News

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"Producers and veterinarians can agree that a strong relationship is critical for success in animal health and when done right, can be rewarding for all involved."



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Calf Health



From The Desk Of Dr. Jeff Sommer

It was nice to see so many of you at the producer meeting we hosted in Milverton on March 12th. Since I've been not able to be on farms since mid January it was great to see so many faces that I've missed seeing over these last couple months. Although it would be impossible to try and summarize a full meeting in such a short space, I will try and mention a few of the highlights for those who were unable to attend, and maybe even as a reminder for those who were able to join us.

We were happy to have Dr. Dave Renaud from the Ontario Vet College speak to the group on calf health entitled, "Why Do Some Calves Thrive and Others Die? Early Life Decisions That Shape Health, Growth, and Survival." He led us through some current research affecting calf growth, health and disease. The first session focused on understanding diarrhea in dairy calves. It likely comes as no surprise that calf diarrhea remains the leading cause of sickness in pre-weaned calves. Maybe more surprising is the research shows that 65-87% of calves will experience at least once scour event in the preweaning period. Also not surprising is that calf diarrhea affects BOTH short- and long-term productivity.

- 2X increase risk of mortality
- 140 gm decrease in ADG
- 1.7X increase risk of resp disease
- 325 kg decrease in Lact 1 milk
- 13% increase in culling risk by 1st lactation

The second session focused on calf pneumonia, the second leading cause of sickness in pre-weaned calves, with research showing 43-71% of calves experiencing at least one case in the preweaning period. Short- and long-term effects of pneumonia include:

- 4.5X increase risk of mortality
- 233-525 kg decrease in Lact 1 milk
- 160 gram/day decease in average daily gain
- 27% increase in culling risk by 1st lactation

If you're thinking this sounds expensive, you're right. Using cost estimates and the low end of the ranges, scours can cost a dairy with 50 calves born per year at 65% prevalence, approximately $20,000 per year, and 43% pneumonia prevalence, also $20,000 per year.

Here is a link that you can download to estimate what these diseases are costing your dairy.



So, what do we do about it? Managing calf scours and pneumonia comes down to several key categories

- **Colostrum management**
- **High quality nutrition**
- **Clean and dry environment**
- **Appropriate treatment**

Dr. Renaud showed several studies demonstrating extended colostrum feedings improved gut development through increased intestinal villa length and surface area, improved health by reduction in scours, pneumonia and treatments and improved growth through increases in average daily gains. In the second session focusing more on pneumonia, the group took a deeper dive into why colostrum matters and why it is so important to achieve successful passive transfer of immunity. Targeting a minimum of 10 g/L of serum IgG in the calf, calves that fell below that threshold were 2.2 x higher risk of mortality, 1.5 x higher risk of diarrhea, and 1.8 x higher risk of pneumonia. By targeting 200 gm of IgG in first feeding, this was typically achieved by feeding 4L of colostrum or 10% of BW of the newborn calf. Increasing to 12% BW at first feeding did not appreciably improve g/L of IgG, but did increase the number of kicks or colic events so is not recommended. By using a Brix refractometer, producers can determine colostrum quality and therefore quantity or volume of colostrum required to achieve that 200 gm threshold. For example, a Brix of 22% represents 50g/L of IgG in colostrum and therefore 4L to achieve 200 gm, where as a Brix of 25% represents approximately 75 gm/L of IgG and only 2.7 L feeding

Category	Serum IgG (g/L)	Total Protein (g/dL)	% Brix	Target (% calves)	Current Ontario level (% calves)	NAHMS study (% calves)
Excellent	≥ 25.0	≥ 6.2	≥ 9.4	> 40	32%	36%
Good	18.0 to 24.9	5.8 to 6.1	8.9 to 9.3	~ 30	17%	26%
Fair	10.0 to 17.9	5.1 to 5.7	8.1 to 8.8	~ 20	32%	27%
Poor	< 10.0	< 5.1	< 8.1	< 10	19%	12%

SCCL or Saskatoon Colostrum Company has an app available to help determine how much powder of colostrum replacer can be potentially added to achieve 22 or 25% Brix if your numbers fall short on any given colostrum. Timing and cleanliness of colostrum are also critical pieces to the puzzle, as research also demonstrates delayed first colostrum feeding by 6 and 12 hours after birth, as well as high bacterial counts in the colostrum, will all decrease serum IgG values in the calf. It is also important not to forget about the second feeding, as colostrum fed at the second meal can further improve serum IgG values in the calf, and ultimately successful passive transfer of immunity. Second meals should be offered no more than 12 hours after the first feeding.

Managing the environment is of course another key piece to raising healthy calves and disease prevention. Key points discussed at the meeting were

- Bedding - nesting scores of 2 or more, depth of wet bedding < 5cm
- Stocking density - 35 sq feet per calf and less than 10 calves per group
- Ventilation – reduce fine dust, provide clean air with no draft, and no ammonia
- Drainage

Appropriate treatment was another important discussion we had with the group both with regard to scours and pneumonia. To do that discussion justice, we will focus on that topic in next month's newsletter.

Calf Health Program

After lunch, we walked though a new service the clinic is offering, a Calf Health Program. We have 2 producers that have helped pilot this program with us starting in the fall, so some preliminary numbers from their herds were shared with the group. A number of you expressed interest in finding out more about the program or signing up. Your herd health vet will be following up with those who expressed some interest, or if you want to know more, please discuss with your herd vet next visit.



Calf Health Program

Raising healthy calves sets the foundation for a productive and profitable future herd. MW Vets Calf Health Program is designed to support you every step of the way—from birth through weaning—with practical, on-farm solutions that make a real difference.

Why Focus on Calf Health? Early-life care has a lasting impact on growth, immunity, and overall performance. By optimizing colostrum management, nutrition, and disease prevention, we can help reduce treatment costs, improve average daily gain, and set your calves up for long-term success.

What Our Calf Health Program Offers:

- **Average Daily Gain Monitoring** – Track growth and performance to ensure calves are on target and identify issues early
- **Serum Total Protein Testing & Colostrum Management** – Evaluate passive transfer and optimize colostrum quality, timing, and volume
- **Hygiene Monitoring** – Assess cleanliness in housing, feeding equipment, and overall environment to reduce disease risk
- **Benchmarking** – Compare your farm's performance to industry standards and other farms enrolled in the program to highlight strengths and uncover opportunities for improvement



Speak with your herd health veterinarian to determine if the Calf Health Program is a good fit for your operation. Alternatively, please contact the clinic and ask to speak with Chelsea, who leads the program, for more information and assistance with enrollment.

Healthy calves today mean a stronger herd tomorrow!

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