

# CALVING EASE

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Sam Leadley (Attica Veterinary Associates) and Pam Sojda (Offhaus Farms)

## Calves Aren't Hungry

Have you tried feeding a **gallon** of colostrum to calves at their first feeding? Both Pam and Sam have. We can report that in some cases these calves aren't interested in eating at the second feeding. Is this bad? Does feeding a gallon harm the calf? This is what Dr. Hutjens of the University of Illinois had to say to a similar question in the July, 1994 issue of Hoard's Dairyman:

"Feeding three or four quarts of high-quality colostrum (large-breed calves) immediately after birth is an excellent way to get the most absorbed antibodies (immunoglobulins). Because of the relatively large volume, the calf may not want or need another two quarts at the next feeding.

Veterinarians and dairy farmers report a small second feeding does not appear to harm the calf. Do not force large volumes after the initial colostrum feeding. An esophageal feeder is helpful to achieve the larger intake at first feeding."

We have adopted the policy at second feeding of offering a bottle to these calves. If they want more, fine. If they don't want any, we don't force any on them.

## Sick Calves and Cold Weather

Anyone never had a sick calf all winter long? If you never have sick calves, skip to the next topic. The rest of us can suffer together.

Question: What's worse in winter weather than one two-week old calf sick with pneumonia that won't eat? (see back for answer)

Answer: Two calves sick ....

Why is this such a severe problem? Why can't we just administer antibiotics and have the usual summer-time recovery? Stop and think about increased energy needs due to

cold temperatures. Add to this slow, hesitant eating by a two-week old sick calf. Result? Slow recovery or death.

*Woe are we! What's to be done? All is lost!* We are often tempted to resort to this kind of mental "hand-wringing." What we really need to do is make certain that, in addition to the antibiotics we give, this sick calf takes in plenty of energy. This is a real problem when pneumonia calves either won't drink at all or drink very slowly. We make certain they get all of each feeding (AM & PM) even if they have to be tubed. In addition, Sam feeds an extra two quarts of milk at noon to these calves.

But, you say, I don't have calves with pneumonia. My calves have scours. Same problem with energy compounded with dehydration. In cold weather both Pam and Sam continue regular milk feeding schedules. That is, scouring calves are fed two quarts of milk AM and PM. That provides uninterrupted energy to stay alive and strong (and, not come down with pneumonia). In addition we feed electrolyte solution separately to severe cases to rehydrate them.

Bottom line? Antibiotics for pneumonia and electrolytes for scours won't give desired results in cold weather if the calves are not eating enough to meet their increased energy needs.

### **A Note on Calf Starter Protein Level**

Recently reported results of one study suggest that higher protein levels lead to higher rates of gain in preweaned calves (Akayezu, 1994). Lower levels were 15% and 16.8% crude protein (CP). Higher levels were 19% and 22.5 % CP. This work done at the University of Minnesota showed that the lowest level starter (15%) gave 66 pounds gain in 56 days. The two higher levels (19% and 22.5 %) resulted in gains of 76 and 75 pounds in 56 days. This difference of roughly 10 pounds gain in 8 weeks may have a value for your operation. Sam and Pam both feed the higher level starters. Sam's records show an average gain of 85 pounds in 56 days for the last 405 calves weaned.

(Source: J.M. Akayezu, J.G. Linn, D.E. Otterby, W. P. Hansen , and D.G. Johnson, "Evaluation of Calf Starters Containing Different Amounts of Crude Protein for Growth of Holstein Calves," Journal of Dairy Science 77:1882-1889 (1994).

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