

Calving Ease

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Doing the Job the Way it should be done

Calf rearing involves many processes. Caring for newborn calves, managing colostrum, feeding, dehorning preweaned calves are all examples. Each process could have a protocol – a written description of the process. Each protocol consists of steps in the order in which they should be done. And, each step describes an action. A clear description including criteria that define the action in measurable terms.

The protocol is the standard for doing the job correctly.

The written protocol is the standard for performing the task. For example, the protocol could be for warming a nursing bottle of colostrum. It might specify steps like these:

- Sanitize the nursing bottle. Fill it one-half full with at least 150° water and 30 ml (1 fluid ounce) household bleach, add nipple, shake to expose all surfaces and drain.
- Fill bottle with refrigerated colostrum and add nipple.
- Insert rapid-read thermometer through vent hole in nipple.
- Place in pail filled with water between 120° - 130°. Add more warm water as needed to maintain the 120 – 130 temperature.
- Observe frequently - the thermometer in the colostrum should read 100° - 105°.

Preparing a new worker to do the job correctly.

I feel most comfortable using a written protocol when preparing a new worker to perform a job properly. We read through the protocol together before practicing the job. Then I show the person(s) how to do the steps in the order shown on the page they have in their hand. Then, it is time for the worker to try the procedure – with guidance as needed. After practicing a couple of times most workers can perform the steps correctly. In this setting it should feel very natural to use the protocol as the performance standard.

How well is an experienced worker following the protocol?

Ideally each farm probably should work out its own approach to monitoring job performance. Nevertheless, there are common steps when preparing for an evaluation. A short one-page resource for this preparation may be found at www.atticacows.com in the Calf Facts section with the title, “Monitoring Compliance with Protocols: A Checklist.”

Finding the right person to do the monitoring is not always easy. I recommend using at least these four criteria:

- Has the knowledge and skills needed to follow the protocol and do the job correctly. When explaining the procedures it helps to know the reasons for the specified quantities, times, temperatures, positions, ordering of steps and so on.
- Has good enough “people skills” to avoid making the worker(s) uneasy or frightened causing them to make mistakes.
- Has good enough “teaching skills” to provide effective re-training for workers not following the prescribed procedures [See www.atticacows.com in Calf Facts section for a checklist, “Training Employees to Follow Protocols.”]
- Has ability to communicate clearly about the job in workers own language.

Selecting the most appropriate time to make your observations depends on three factors:

- Is the job done on a predictable schedule or on an “as needed” basis? For example, mixing milk replacer probably happens regularly at set times. In order to observe all one has to do is show up at one of those times. In contrast, warming refrigerated colostrum is done on demand – when a calf is born. In order to observe it probably makes sense to set up a “practice run” when convenient for the supervisor and worker.
- Does the job involve using expensive materials? For example, preparing modified live vaccines is best observed when a worker is actually mixing them. But, vaccines are expensive. Therefore, when calves are regularly scheduled to be vaccinated may be the best time to observe vaccine preparation. The same would be true for mixing a batch of milk replacer – it does not make sense to mix a batch of milk replacer for “practice” and discard it. Milk replacer is expensive.
- How prepared is the worker to perform well? For example, workers that are tired, not feeling well or distracted by non-work life issues often make errors. Steps are skipped. Amounts are measured incorrectly. Inappropriate cleaning chemicals are used. It’s best to observe performance when workers are prepared to do a good job.

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A limited number of back issues may be accessed on the Internet at either www.atticacows.com or www.calfnotes.com and clicking on the link, Calving Ease.

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Normal Average	25.7	36.2	47.3	56.7

Group	Birth	41 Days	148 Days	172 Days
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