

# CALVING EASE

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## INCONSISTENT STARTER CONSUMPTION

Imagine this. You are feeding calf starter. You come to a calf's grain pail that seems to have nearly the same amount of grain in it as when you filled it yesterday. Yet, you remember having to add nearly two pounds of grain yesterday. What's going on here?

Of course one possibility is that the calf is sick. Onset of pneumonia is one common reason for sudden loss of appetite. But, let's assume that this calf is not sick - no fever, alert, jumping around kind of healthy.

Several months ago Sam heard Jim Quigley, University of Tennessee, talk briefly about starter consumption. He had observed variations in starter consumption that seemed to form a pattern. The calf would eat heavily. Then, the next day the amount of starter eaten would decrease by a large amount. Then, the next day the amount of starter eaten would increase by a large amount. That is, consumption rates seemed to be following a somewhat regular pattern, a cycle.

After hearing this Sam began to watch the starter consumption for the 90-100 calves he had in hutches. Each of his hutches is marked with a poultry leg band to show the "normal" amount of starter eaten by each calf. He didn't see evidence of these patterns in very young calves - maybe they just were not eating enough starter to visually observe variations (Sam doesn't weight uneaten amounts like Quigley does on research projects). Among healthy older calves, however, at least half of them had up-and-down cycles that were easily observed.

Many weaned calves varied from 3 to 6 pounds a day. This was regarded as a "Ho Hum" event. So what? Sam didn't change any management practices because of this. But, among pre-weaned calves the variation often seemed to be between 1/2 and 2 1/2 pounds over 2 to 4 days. Were they ready to wean (based on starter intake) or not ready to wean? Sam previously used a 2-and-2 rule for weaning - eat 2 pounds 2 days in a row = ready to wean. Well, now he tries to take this

variation more into account. He's looking for an average of 2 pounds daily over 4 to 5 days.

Results? A few calves have been delayed in weaning. On the basis of just 2 days they were eating enough. But, over 3 to 4 days they were eating much less than 2 pounds daily. If you have fewer than 5 calves at this stage you can probably remember how much each calf eats. But if you have 20 or more calves that are at this growth stage at one time, it's essential to have some way to mark the hutches to show the amount of grain eaten. Some folks use clips that are moved around on the wire around the front of the hutch or pen. Sam uses two colors of poultry leg bands.

### **Calf Feeders' Tip**

Here are two ideas to use when vaccinating calves. First, purchase a small bottle of epinephrine. It can be tucked into your pocket or in a bucket you use to carry supplies when vaccinating calves. In that one-in-a-hundred situation when a calf reacts to the injected vaccine, you have the antidote, epinephrine, immediately on hand. We like the peace of mind knowing that we are prepared for this unusual event. It's better than racing to the cow barn for the epinephrine and coming back to a nearly dead calf. Second idea. This only applies to folks who vaccinate for two diseases at the same time. For example, one injection with a modified-live virus for respiratory disease and a second injection for a bacterial disease. How to identify the syringes so that one is used only for the virus vaccine and the other only for the bacterial vaccine. Some folks use different size syringes - for example, one 3 cc and one 12cc. Some folks use two 3 cc syringes but with a rubber band on one of them with a second rubber band on the matching vaccine bottle. Others use two 3 cc syringes with different needles - either different gauges or lengths.

### **Giving Credit When Credit is Due**

It's not always easy to pinpoint the origin of every idea in Calving Ease. Where we quote published materials we try to cite the references accurately. What about ideas in general and conversations? One special source that deserves recognition for giving general direction and assisting with provocative ideas for Calving Ease is **Dr. James D. Quigley, III**. Jim Quigley taught and did research at the Institute of Agriculture, Department of Animal Science, University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Now employed by American Protein Corporation Dr. Quigley directs their calf research program. During the past several years Jim has been very helpful in advising the editors on a variety of subjects. He deserves a public,

"Thank you." Readers with Internet access may want to read Jim's **Calf Notes** at [www.calfnotes.com](http://www.calfnotes.com)

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