

CALVING EASE

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REMINDERS FOR WARM WEATHER MANAGEMENT

Most of us have worked out routines for our heifer-care jobs. There are, however, both good and bad consequences of work routines. On the plus side we know that routines save us the extra effort of thinking through each and every step of jobs. Just start the job and run on "auto-pilot." That kind of routine also helps us remember to do all the little steps that might be forgotten; like setting the bottle of epinephrine into the pail of vaccines and syringes as we get ready to vaccinate heifers. On the down side we know that routines tend not to be changed even when circumstances change. The routines we used when we had twenty calves are still being used even though we now have forty calves. Are routines that were fine for cold weather still being followed in the summer months? Let's be careful to quickly review our routines as hot weather arrives this year.

COLOSTRUM MANAGEMENT

Our parlors are relatively cold during the winter. Of course, it's below freezing outside. Chilling colostrum is not usually a problem. Now summer has slipped up on us. Are we still leaving colostrum in the parlor for an hour or more after the fresh dam is milked? How about adding an extra sanitizing step just before milking for the colostrum containers? Fresh colostrum when stored in a well-sanitized container and promptly refrigerated should last about five days. We try to use a chlorine rinse for pails into which we are going to pour just-collected colostrum. Also, we try to snatch colostrum from the parlor in the summer as soon as we can after the dam is milked. It goes directly into (1) a calf, or (2) the refrigerator, or (3) the freezer. Remember, many bacteria double in numbers every twenty minutes at temperatures near 90 F.

VACCINATION MANAGEMENT

Many of us have begun to use modified-live vaccines for heifers. Of course, we remember to mix them just prior to their use. But, especially in hot, sunny weather, we need to protect them from both excessive heat and direct sunlight in order to realize the full benefits of vaccinating heifers. If we have more than just a couple of heifers to vaccinate, we drop the mixed vaccine in a small pail with an ice pack or two. These ice packs have just come out of the freezer. Even in very hot weather they stay cold for at least an hour. They are solid so no sunlight can get through them to the vaccine underneath.

In very hot weather, timing of vaccinations can be managed, too. By limiting the effects of heat stress on the heifers, we expect to increase the impact of the vaccination. Sometimes, we wait a day or two to get over a hot spell. Other times we feel the need to vaccinate before making a change in heifer ration, housing, or grouping. We know that studies have found that maximum core body temperatures on hot days usually occur in bovines three to five hours after the outdoor peak temperature is reached. That's why we try to vaccinate early morning rather than late afternoon - heat stress levels are less then.

WATER MANAGEMENT

This discussion of heat stress brings us naturally to water. Without adequate water heifers become dehydrated. Dehydrated heifers are stressed-out heifers. Stressed-out heifers have impaired immune systems. They get sick easily. They respond poorly to vaccinations.

Solution? Water. In group pens we have made a real effort to change to automatic float filling. Hand-filled water tanks tend to run dry too often in hot weather when heifers drink more. In hutches or pens calves need water, too. Just a short story here from Sam's summer experience several years ago. His regular water supply went dry. They hauled in water - but from a sulfur well. The sulfurous taste was quite strong. If a calf was desperate, she would drink this but only then. Weaning calves was just awful; stressed-out calves developed pneumonia; weight gains dropped. So, water quality can be a factor to take into consideration, too (both palatability and biological quality).

OVERALL STRESS MANAGEMENT

It's easy to continue routines from cooler weather right into summer. In April we may be able to combine or stack the stresses of changes in ration and housing without problems. When we try the same thing in July we get sick calves. The addition of heat stress to that of changing both ration and housing at the same time is just too much. Also, it is tempting to combine management tasks (dehorning, vaccinating) when we are moving heifers. Then we have stacked even more stress on top of heat stress.

This past year we have worked hard at scheduling both dehorning and vaccinating either a week before or a week after changing housing. Especially in the summer we try to introduce the weaning pen grain to the calves in hutches four to five days before they get moved to the weaning pens.

FLY MANAGEMENT

There may be some truth in the saying, "If you notice flies on the heifers, you have a fly problem." How you control the fly population is not important. What counts is that the fly population is controlled or reduced to a low level. Flies are one more source of stress for heifers. Also, they are a means of spreading pinkeye from an infected animal to healthy heifers.

Heifer calves need to be watched for blow fly maggots, as well. These are nasty to clean up but we find early detection means a lot less work. Newborns that have left-over amniotic fluid on

their backs and tail heads are prime candidates for this kind of infestation. Naturally, scouring calves are also frequent targets for these flies to lay their eggs. Recommended treatments vary. All of them involve physically removing the maggots from the calf. Some folks use plain soap and warm water. Others use hydrogen peroxide as a rinse after washing with water. Others also use commercial spray preparations. Your vet may have a recommendation. The key to effective treatment is early detection.

If you know of someone that doesn't currently receive **Calving Ease** but would like to, tell them to **WRITE** to **Calving Ease**, 11047 River Road, Pavilion, NY 14525 or to **CALL** either 585-591-2660 (Attica Vet Assoc. office) or 585-343-8128 (Offhaus Farms Office) or **FAX** (585-591-2898) or **e-mail** sleadley@frontiernet.net or pams91@2ki.net. A limited number of back issues may be accessed on the Internet at www.calfnotes.com and clicking on the link, Calving Ease.