

Calving Ease

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Quality Care at Harvest Time

Summary:

1. Assign as few extra workers to provide calf care as possible. The same person to fill in is better than more people and it is easier to train that way, too.
2. Write down what the person is supposed to do – often we call these protocols.
3. Arrange work to make it easy to be consistent.
4. Make availability to provide care at a consistent hour a high priority when selecting a substitute worker.

Let's review what makes up quality care for milk-fed calves. Is the milk replacer mixed the same way every feeding? How about amount of milk replacer fed – same amount every feeding? Is grain and water feeding is consistent from day to day? Diagnosis of treatable scours or respiratory illness is reliable? Is the quality of supportive care for seriously ill calves high?

One of our biggest challenges during harvest time is meeting the labor demands of harvesting and, at the same time, keeping up quality of calf care.

Tip Number One

If the regular calf care person is likely to be pulled away to do harvest-related jobs try to assign the same substitute worker all the time. Adequate preparation and training is essential for a substitute worker if he/she is going to provide consistent quality care to milk-fed calves. It's a lot more likely to achieve good training results with as few substitute workers as possible. At www.atticacows.com in the Calving Ease section you can find the August 2010 issue that gives tips on training substitute workers. Also, at the same site in the Calf Facts section you can scroll to "Training employees to follow protocols checklist" for tips on doing effective training.

Tip Number Two

Have your expectations of the substitute worker written down. For example, mixing milk replacer job is described in straight forward steps like these:

1. Fill 30-gallon plastic waste can ½ full of 120° water.
2. Add 39 pounds of milk replacer powder.
3. Mix thoroughly with whisk.
4. Add enough water to fill barrel adjusting water temperature to end up with 105° mix.

If calves are fed different volumes of milk or milk replacer depending on their age make written note (maybe on a dry-erase board) that details by calf number the volume to be fed. Or, some farms mark individual pens or hutches to show the milk feeding rate. Others put markers on the first and last pen in a group that all receive the same volume. Do not depend on verbal instructions as the main means of communication.

Or, if there is a pattern to be followed in feeding calves (for example, often it is from youngest to oldest) draw this out on a piece of paper. That is a lot better means of communication than waving your arms and pointing.

Tip Number Three

Make it easy to do jobs consistently. For example, have a chart that will show the person how much milk replacer to mix for each feeding once they know the number of calves to be fed. Show them how to use the chart. No multiplying this by that to get the answer.

Or, if they need to mix milk replacer at 15 percent solids show them how to use a table that will tell them how much powder to include. Then, provide a scale so they can weigh the powder rather than guessing by volume.

Further, feeding the same amount of milk or milk replacer is important. Make it easy to do this. Finding a scoop that is just the right size works better than telling a person to feed $\frac{3}{4}$ of a scoop or some similar volume where a decision has to be made repeatedly.

Tip Number Four

Remember that one aspect of consistency is the time of day the care is provided. And, feeding is the most important of these jobs. When lining up a substitute worker, as much as possible, select a person that is available consistently at the same hour of the day to feed calves.

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** 585-591-2660 (Attica Vet Assoc. office) or **FAX** (585-591-2898) or **e-mail** calvingease@rochester.rr.com. 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.

Our thanks to Intervet/Shearing-Plough Animal Health for supporting
Calving Ease.

Looking for calf rearing resources? Try these Internet links for current and practical tips.

- Go to http://www.dairyherd.com/calfheifer.asp?ts=crcm1&pgID=751&ed_id=7286 for the Dairy Herd Management Calf and Heifer Resource Center jointly sponsored with the Dairy Calf and Heifer Association (<http://www.calfandheifer.org/> and click on DCHA Learning Center). Links to other sources are included as well as many short, practical calf management tips.
- Try this site for additional calf resources: <http://www.vetmed.wisc.edu/dms/fapm/fapmtools/calves.htm> from the Univ. Wisconsin College of Veterinary Medicine. Of special interest is Dr. McGuirk's pictorial guide for early detection of respiratory illness.