

CALVING EASE

September 1995 (Revised Jan '04)

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

BIO-SECURITY

For many dairy farms, bio-security refers solely to the need to isolate purchased springing heifers and /or cows prior to mixing them with the existing herd. So, why is bio-security of interest to calf raisers?

As calf raisers we work with the most vulnerable animals on the dairy farm. The calves start life with virtually no defenses against bacteria, viruses and parasites. Our only effective action against these pathogens is lots of high quality colostrum as soon as possible after birth. We depend on the antibodies in Mom's colostrum to create enough immunity to last until baby calf's immune system is functional.

We know that the profile of antibodies in our farm's colostrum is partly a result of the cows being exposed to the pathogens on our farm. In a stable situation the kinds antibodies should pretty well match the kinds of pathogens. The bottom line is that our colostrum is "tailor-made" for our circumstances. Of course, we can change this by using vaccines, also.

What if a new pathogen (bacteria, virus, parasite) is "accidentally introduced" to the calves' environment? Will Mom's colostrum have antibodies that match this new threat to calf health? Maybe not. Mom has to be exposed to the pathogen in order to have an immune response to it. That has to happen before the pathogen-specific antibodies can appear in the colostrum.

But, you say, I wouldn't bring in a new pathogen on purpose. Well, no you wouldn't. Maybe it could just happen without you noticing it - accidentally!

What do we mean, "accidentally introduced?" Let's start with a common medium for pathogens, manure. How could manure from another farm get transported to your calf barn or hutch area? Delivery trucks? Dead-stock truck? Salesperson's feet? Veterinarian's truck? Cattle hauling equipment? Our own personal vehicle that stopped at another farm on the way to work?

Think about it. How could manure be carried into the calf barn or into the hutch area? At both of our farms we use high flotation vehicles to carry feed to the hutch areas. In both cases we drive back and forth across busy driveways at least half a dozen times daily on the way to and from the hutches. Traffic from everywhere goes in and out the drive. Muddy weather. Our vehicles have knobby tires that load up with mud. Do you see how the manure gets from one place to another? If you don't think this is a real situation, how do you suppose hairy foot wart pathogens have spread from farm to farm to farm?

Clearly, the real-life situation can't include too many cases of serious pathogens introduced from external sources. We don't have calves dying left and right from mysterious causes. On the other hand, do we have so little risk that we should be complacent? Each calf raiser will have to answer this question individually. It is challenging to begin thinking about ways to reduce exposure to bacteria, viruses and parasites coming from "off-farm" sources.

WARNING: August Heat May Be a Problem in September

August heat stress may bring September coccidiosis outbreaks? It might be true especially for our five to nine week-old heifers.

During the first week of September we've seen at least four heifers consuming normally effective amounts of a coccidiostat (in starter) with clinical-level coccidiosis. Our current guess is that the extended August heat stress suppressed the heifer immune system enough to allow multiplication of coccidia in spite of the coccidiostat. Then, once there are too many coccidia for the heifer's immune system to deal with, she shows clinical symptoms such as loose manure, rough haircoat and lack of body condition.

Check with your veterinarian for diagnosis (microscopic examination of feces is usually a reliable diagnostic method) and treatment for your situation. Once we had lab results confirming coccidiosis we used an amprolium drench (for example, Corid) with good results.

Calf Feeder's Tip

Lots of us buy navel dip a gallon at a time. Then we pour the dip into our squeeze or spray bottle prior to using it. How much dip ends up on the milk house floor? A small household funnel can be attached to the gallon navel-dip jug with a piece of fishing line (anything nylon-like will do). You make the line long enough so you can both pour from the jug and put the funnel in the small container at the same time. This is Pam's way of being certain, when refilling the small container, that the small funnel is always handy to reduce the amount of dip that decorates the floor.

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.