

# CALVING EASE

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

## Feeding Fermented Transition Milk

For this letter we are calling the second and third milking from mature cows "transition milk." This milk is higher in total milk solids than regular whole milk (second milking =17.9 percent, third milking =14.1 percent, milk =12.9 percent). What to do with this milk? It's an excellent source of nutrients for young calves. But! On most farms the supply is irregular. It's highly perishable. This letter describes one farms' solution to these problems.

### Feeding Fermented Milk at Coyne Farms

This is a report of our conversation with Coyne Farms' calf raiser, Mary Jo Bartron. She indicated that they have chosen to preserve their transition milk as well as heifer colostrum by fermenting it. Given the amounts of the different milkings she estimated coming from the parlor we guess that the blend may have about a 19 percent solids content.

### GETTING STARTED

Mary Jo makes certain that the milk that goes into the process is clean. The bucket milkers used in the parlor to collect the milk are scrubbed regularly. Also, they are sanitized with a chlorine rinse just prior to collecting this milk.

The milk is dumped directly from the bucket milkers into a thirty gallon waste barrel. She starts with clean barrels. Milk is added until the barrel is nearly full. Then the next barrel is started. Each barrel is blended two times a day. For this mixing Mary Jo uses a yard-long plastic stick that is easy to keep clean.

We asked, "How long do you have to wait until the fermented mix is ready to feed?" She said that the references she got from Dairy-L archives indicated that fermentation could take up to twenty-one days. In her experience this waiting

period varied. Often seven to ten days was enough to achieve the "right" consistency and odor. Mary Jo said that it only took her a few barrels to learn to recognize the desired amount of fermentation. We wanted to know if it was easy to tell spoiled milk from properly fermented milk. "Oh," she replied, "It's easy. The smell and texture are completely different and once it has happened you won't forget it, either."

## FEEDING THE FERMENTED MIX

Mary Jo has chosen to feed the limited amount of fermented mix to her calves from birth to two weeks of age. Then she switches to a 20-20 milk replacer. How does she get the mix ready to feed? She starts with a five gallon pail. In the warmer months (not freezing weather) she fills the pail half full of mix. Then enough warm water is added to fill the pail. She adjusts the water temperature to get the blended mix warm enough to feed. A rapid-read thermometer is kept nearby to check this temperature. Then calves get two quarts twice a day.

When the weather is below freezing, this blend is modified. In order to increase the solids content Mary Jo adds milk replacer powder to the blended mix. Her recipe for typical winter weather (in the 20's) is two gallons of fermented milk, four eight-ounce scoops of 20-20 milk replacer and enough warm water to fill the five-gallon pail. This is thoroughly mixed. Then calves get two quarts twice a day.

We asked, "If calves have eaten two feedings of fresh colostrum at birth, how do they react to this mix? Do you have a lot of refusals?" "About half of them stick their noses up at it at the first feeding. By the next day very few calves are fussing. A calf that won't adapt to the fermented milk is quite rare," she replied. The two or three calves a year like this are just fed milk replacer. "Remember," she said, "This is only for the first two weeks."

What happens if she runs out of fermented milk? Mary Jo said, "I just feed milk replacer like anyone else. But I really do like to have the fermented milk for the little ones. When I have calves side-by-side that have had the fermented milk rather than milk replacer, I think I can see the difference in them at the end of two weeks."

As editors we chose to share Mary Jo's experience as a way to get us thinking about alternative ways to solve calf raising problems. Both of Pam and Sam find that day-to-day routines leave us little time to consider different ways to deal with the challenges that come up all the time in raising healthy calves.

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