

Calving Ease

April/May 2020

By Sam Leadley and Kazzie Nero



Making Your Calf Care Team More Robust

- **Out of the blue, anything can happen to cripple your calf care team**
- **Backup is possible to plan.**
- **Effective teaching of calf care skills is not difficult.**

Out of the blue, anything can happen to cripple your calf care team.

In our current environment we are most likely to think of sickness. Yes, COVID-19 is foremost in our minds these days. On one hand, we would like to think that farm families and workers are isolated enough to prevent COVID-19 exposure. On the other hand, contacts through purchasing groceries and medications as well as getting other essential services cannot be avoided. Therefore, an unanticipated illness or death, divorce, family disagreements and on and on can result in one or more key players in calf care disappearing from our dairy.

Backup is possible to plan.

Most of us have some kind of labor backup plan in place. Appointments with the doctor, a child care obligation and regular days off are examples of when the core calf care person(s) must be replaced. When one or more persons will be gone for one shift or a day, we have already plans in place. But, filling in for a vacancy for three weeks, a month or more takes more preparation.

First, as we begin to plan we need to identify one or more persons that are both willing and capable of cross-training with calf care skills.

Second, we have to plan time to do the skills education to bring this person's skills up to acceptable standards.

Effective teaching of calf care skills is not difficult.

The most effective sequence of steps in teaching skills is :

1. **Demonstrate** the skill using the equipment that is usually used to do the job.
2. **Practice** the skill. Have the learner repeat the steps they have just seen demonstrated.
3. **Evaluate.** The teacher watches the student practice the skill in doing the job.
4. As needed, this “Demonstrate, Practice, Evaluate” cycle is repeated until the learner’s performance is acceptable.

Skill training may be limited to only the most basic skills performed daily (how to warm colostrum, how to bottle feed a calf, how to mix milkreplacer, how to feed calf starter grain). Or, more complex skills may be needed depending on the jobs that were done by the staff that were lost.

An excellent review of calf care skills is available at the Penn State University Cooperative Extension Dairy website.

The link to this site (URL) is:

<https://extension.psu.edu/caltrack-calf-management-system>

or if you are reading this on a computer you probably can go there with a click [HERE](#).

This will allow you to download the document in either English (86 pages total) or Spanish (90 pages total). Parts of the document may be printed separately (for example, if you only want the part on colostrum management).

The calf management system is divided in to seven parts:

1. Newborn calf care
2. Colostrum management
3. Liquid feed management
4. Cleaning and sanitation
5. Dry feed and Weaning
6. Calf comfort
7. Calf Health

On a personal note, thanks for being patient with Kazzie and Sam. Kazzie was shifted to working remotely by her employer, Dairy One. Sam’s vet clinic pushed him out as non-essential personnel. He now uses a VPN link to access his computer. We are trying to catch up with a double issue (April/May). And, Sam had a 4-month long close encounter with cancer (surgery and radiation therapy) that slowed him down, too. We are committed to doing a great job in promoting excellent calf care.

Thanks to Merck Animal Health for sponsor this issue. More on their Calf products see <https://www.merck-animal-health-usa.com/species/cattle/products/All>

For more calf management resources, go to www.calfacts.com.

Have you visited the “Calves with Sam” blog for snips of calf news?