

CALVING EASE

August, 2008

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Expecting the Unexpected

How many times have you been frustrated by tasks “popping up?” Your plans for the morning went down the chute! But, is it possible to plan for the unexpected?

Repeatable Events

Many of our “unexpected” events actually happen repeatedly. The “unexpected” aspect is the unpredictability of exactly when they will happen. It may be possible to predict with the range of a week, month or season of year that an event will occur.

For example, having a down or weak calf (or calves) is a common calf care event. While sometimes these down-calf events seemed to go in cycles other times they just happened. Treatments are usually concentrated in the times shortly after either a feeding.

Another example for me was spraying for flies. The calf operation spraying was done after the contractor finished spraying production-cow barns. Since those barns were sprayed irregularly based on “fly-count” numbers I could never predict when the spray crew would show up. We had to pull out all the feeding equipment, spray, and put all the buckets and feeders back afterwards. Spraying intervals could be anywhere from three to five weeks but only in fly season.

Weather events often caused peak labor demands. Summer thunderstorms often flooded grain feeders. Winter storms can dump snow into feeders. They occur every year but predicting just which week seems impossible.

Peaks in calving are always going to happen. While pregnancy data tell us about when calves are going to be born they are unreliable in predicting daily calvings. We all have lived through a slump for a couple of days followed by an outrageous number the next day.

It may not be worthwhile to actually keep a written log of these events. However, having a heightened awareness of them will imprint them in our memory. That way we begin to plan for many of the bumps in the road.

Thinking Ahead

Most calf enterprises are run on a “labor-tight” basis. If you need 1.2 persons to do the job there may be only 1 person to get the work done. This means there is no “safety margin” built into the system to cover fluctuations in the work load – everyone is already up to or over 100 percent. This means when an “unexpected” event occurs usually other work must be postponed.

This means that the various jobs must be assigned priorities for completion. What will get done first? Some work has to be done everyday at approximately the same time – for example, feeding milk to preweaned calves. Other work, while required daily, can be done as labor is available.

Vaccinating, dehorning, and measuring calves might be scheduled for weekly completion. But, given “unexpected” events the day of the week for the job might be changed. For example, in the case of extremely cold or hot weather I often held off vaccinating until a break in the weather.

Thus, flexibility is one key in adapting to unanticipated events. This usually means having to shift from one plan for the day to another on short notice. You must be able to make needed shifts on one day while remembering to work in the postponed jobs the following day or week. I found in order to do this I had to schedule regular jobs for daily, weekly and monthly completion. Key words? Organization. Scheduling.

Recognize the need for help

It is common to think that if I just work a little bit harder and longer that all the jobs will get done. With unexpected events added to the regular calfcare jobs sometimes this is just not true. If we are going to maintain standards of good quality care there are times when we have to admit that working harder and longer is not going to get us out of crisis mode. I can recall times when postponing regular work did not begin to restore sanity. I had to ask for help – to dig out from a snowstorm, to treat sick calves during a salmonella outbreak, to help feed colostrum when we had four or five times the normal number of calves in one day.

It helps a great deal to have anticipated the eventual need for help. Involving persons that usually do not work in calfcare in cross-training can have huge benefits. This gives you a “backup” person that can warm colostrum, tube a calf, give injections or properly mix milk replacer. Saying, “Let me show you how to just in case you have to do it,” often works.

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 **CALL** 585-591-2660 (Attica Vet Assoc. office) or **FAX** 585-591-2898, or **e-mail** sleadley@frontiernet.net. Back issues may be accessed on the Internet at www.atticacows.com, click on the Resources menu, select Calf Management Newsletter.

Our thanks to Intervet/Schering-Plough Animal Health for supporting this issue of Calving Ease.