

# COLOSTRUM SUPPLEMENTS:

## Strategies for Using

### 1. Strategies for using supplements

- **Most cost effective** – evaluate antibody levels in all colostrum, both cow and heifer colostrum using a Colostrometer® or Brix refractometer. Then, when poorer quality colostrum must be fed, use a supplement. Continue feeding four quarts of clean colostrum as soon as possible after birth. During periods of the year when pathogen exposure may be higher than usual consider using a supplement with all calves to raised. This is often during wet and changeable weather.
- **Moderately cost effective** – no evaluation of antibody levels. When available choose to feed colostrum from cows rather than heifers. Supplement all the heifer colostrum that must be fed. During periods of the year when pathogen exposure may be higher than usual consider using a supplement with all calves to raised.
- **Least cost effective** – no evaluation of antibody levels. Add a supplement for every calf regardless of the colostrum fed and pathogen exposure.
- For all supplement-use strategies it is cost effective to monitor passive transfer of antibodies. For the procedure see this web site: [www.calfacts.com](http://www.calfacts.com) scroll to “Passive immunity: How to test for.”

### 2. How well do they supplement antibodies?

- They vary in immunoglobulin (Ig) content. Many contain only about 40 to 50 grams of Ig.
- Successful passive transfer can be achieved with poor quality colostrum when one package of supplement is fed no later than four hours after

birth. This assumes that four quarts of colostrum have also been fed. Depending on the brand used, one package of supplement may be one packet, tube or bolus of supplement. “Poor” quality is defined as 30 gms/liter, red on Colostrometer® or below 22 on a Brix refractometer. For a resource on Colostrometer use click [HERE](#). For a resource on Brix refractometer use for evaluating colostrum click [HERE](#).

- Very poor quality colostrum would require two, if not three, units of supplement to get the calf up to successful passive transfer level. Actual success is doubtful with only one supplement dose. “Very poor” quality is defined as less than 20 gms/liter.

Effective use depends on following the manufacturer’s instructions carefully. For powdered supplements, dilute with water. Avoid adding powdered supplements directly to colostrum. This practice may substantially depress the number of antibodies absorbed

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