

Colostrum Feeding Checklist

How do your procedures measure up? Do they provide the opportunity for your calves to grow into their genetic potential?

Let's consider procedures for feeding colostrum. Compare your routines with the standards in this checklist. When making this evaluation I like to use these scores:

1=never, 2=seldom, 3=often, 4=usually, and 5=almost always.

- _____ 1. All feeding equipment that comes in contact with colostrum is scrubbed after every use. This means both inside and outside surfaces.
- _____ 2. When periodically cultured for bacteria, colostrum as fed to calves is not contaminated with environmental bacteria thus reducing the risk of septicemia and scours. Very highly contaminated colostrum may substantially reduce the rate of antibody transfer as well.
- _____ 3. Colostrum contaminated with mastitis and blood is discarded.
- _____ 4. Colostrum quality (antibody concentration) is estimated and the best quality available fed to heifer calves. While only a very rough guide to quality, a Colostrometer® or a Brix refractometer may be used to exclude the lowest quality colostrum. Feeding a larger volume of poor quality colostrum is not an effective substitute for a good quality product.
- _____ 5. Colostrum is fed to heifer calves no more than four hours after birth and to at least one-half of the heifer calves within one hour after birth. About one-half of a heifer's ability to absorb antibodies is gone within six hours.
- _____ 6. Plenty of good quality colostrum is fed. Average and large calves are fed four quarts within the first six hours. Smaller calves are fed proportionately less but still more than two quarts.
- _____ 7. When only low quality colostrum (low antibody concentration) is available, either an effective colostrum supplement is also fed to boost its antibody content or a colostrum replacer is fed in place of the colostrum.
- _____ 8. When a colostrum replacer is fed, if there is low antibody colostrum available it is also fed within the first 24 hours after birth.
- _____ 9. When possible, fresh colostrum is fed rather than stored colostrum. Thus, the calf gets a full dose of maternal immune cells as well as the maternal antibodies.

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