

Hot Weather Calf Care Tips

Hot weather and calves don't go together: think of oil and water. Calves thrive in cool weather. Calves have a hard time coping with hot weather. They consider anything above 15° warm. Weather above 21° is just plain hot for them.

Providing a Cooler Environment

If your calves are housed in a barn or shed, the answer is ventilation. Fans, open curtain walls, natural convection are all ways to move air indoors.

If your calves are housed in hutches, be sure any vents built into the hutches are open. Some calf managers have situations where the backs of hutches can be raised 20cm to provide ventilation at bedding level.

Providing lots of clean water

Milk replacer does not provide water for the rumen to promote fermentation of calf starter grains. Remember the 1 to 4 rule for water feeding (by weight). For each unit of calf starter grain fed, provide at least 4 units of water .

Older calves eating calf starter grains need plenty of clean water in order to efficiently ferment their feed and to carry the rumen contents on into the other stomach compartments.

In hot weather, even more water is used by calves to maintain normal body temperatures.

Offering ad-lib water is repaid by increased calf comfort, increased weight gains and improved health. But, unpalatable water doesn't count as ad-lib water.

Water containers need to be emptied frequently. Research has demonstrated a 40 to 50g/day increase in liveweight gain when water is kept clean and fresh compared to just adding water to a murky bucket. Algae deposits grow quickly in hot weather and need to be scrubbed out of water buckets.

Providing palatable concentrates

Begin with a good quality concentrates. Choose a concentrate with as low a rate of fines as you can afford. Try to get one with good pellet quality – look for most of the pellets remaining still intact after a day in a concentrate bucket.

Remember that in hot weather, the fats in concentrates can turn rancid very quickly. For the youngest calves, I have always fed only a handful of calf grain at any one time and changed it daily. One purpose of renewing it every day for the youngest calves is to avoid the rancid smell. Also, this provides a fresh aroma that attracts calves.

Containers for older calves need daily attention, too. Even small amounts of liquid (water, milk, and urine) provide a favorable environment for mold growth. Calves seem to be quite sensitive to moldy odors. Fresh concentrate simply added on top of moldy grain often goes uneaten.

Taking advantage of cooler evening temperatures

Even strong, healthy calves merit extra attention in hot weather. Many young calves spend more than 80% of their time lying down regardless of the weather.

This percentage of time lying down increases during hot daytime hours. When calves are resting they are not eating. In the summer, many calf managers observe the highest rates of concentrate intake are between 6pm and 6am. That's when the calves are up and more active.

This means that calf managers need to take extra care to see that calves have enough supplies of both fresh concentrate and water between 5pm and 7am.

Sam Leadley, Calf & Heifer Management Specialist
Shirley Macmillan, United Kingdom Editor
sleadley@yahoo.com www.atticacows.com
© Attica Vet. Assoc. 2019 All Rights Reserved

Promoting earlier and greater concentrate pays off in decreasing post-weaning slump.

Caring for chronically sick calves

Calves that get too little poor quality colostrum too late seem to get scours at the least little thing and often have to be treated for respiratory illness. They will take longer to begin eating concentrate.

If chronically sick calves are observed carefully, you can delay starting to wean them until they have been consistently eating some concentrate for at least two weeks. These extra days before starting weaning will permit maturation of the rumen lining and walls. Then, when weaned, these calves will be able to digest the carbohydrates and proteins in grains and absorb these nutrients.