



# **BASIC CALF CARE SKILL SHEETS**

## **8. Feed a Calf with an Esophageal or Tube Feeder**

### **Equipment:**

- **Esophageal feeder (be certain bulb is in place at end of tube).**
- **Colostrum, milk or electrolyte.**

### **Action Required:**

- **Prepare esophageal feeder and milk.**
- **Restrain calf; calf in standing position is preferred, if lying down, calf needs to be up on her belly.**
- **Insert feeding tube – the tube must be free of fluid both when put into the esophagus and when it is removed.**
- **Feel for the tube in the esophagus as the tube is being passed.**
- **Observe the feeding rate.**
- **Watch for milk flooding the calf's mouth or choking.**

### **Physical Observations:**

- **Normal behavior – continuous sucking action around the tube, no choking, two quarts fed in about one minute.**
- **Abnormal behavior – milk in the calf’s mouth or choking. Due to poor muscle tone of the esophagus, milk may be coming back up past the bulb into her mouth.**

**If it reaches the top of the esophagus, the milk will spill into the windpipe (trachea). The calf coughs and chokes.**

**Stop feeding until the calf recovers and is breathing normally. Resume feeding at a slower rate.**

### **Biosecurity:**

- **Eliminate as much as possible contact between the newborn calf and adult cow manure. Remember to clean adult cow manure off your boots and clothing before handling young calves.**