

CALVING EASE

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Shelf Life of Stored Colostrum

Shelf life is that length of time that a perishable item is given before it is considered unsuitable for use. In the case of maternal colostrum bacterial contamination is the measure determining suitability. The criteria using laboratory incubation methods are: [cfu/ml = colony forming units per milliliter]

1. Total or standard plate count of less than 100,000 cfu/ml all bacteria, and
2. Coliform count of less than 10,000 cfu/ml.

LEAST EFFECTIVE METHOD

Storing colostrum at barn or milk house temperature – shelf life of less than 24 hours. If you sit a pail of colostrum in the milk house at 70° (21°C) coliform bacteria will double hourly. Other bacteria species will grow, too, but at a slower rate. It is common at 12 hours to find bacteria counts of over one million in colostrum stored this way if parlor and equipment sanitation are compromised. In the name of good calf health, if you cannot feed the colostrum within one-half hour after collection discard it.

OKAY TO FEED FOR TWO DAYS

If a bacterial growth inhibitor or preservative is added at the time colostrum is collected then the generation time [length of time needed to double the population] is ten times as long. If you start with reasonably clean colostrum and add potassium sorbate liquid preservative, then at milk house temperature the colostrum may be under 100,000 cfu/ml about two days later. However, if as harvested the colostrum is already at 10,000 cfu/ml your colostrum is not likely to be suitable for feeding.

Or, if you chill your colostrum to 60° (16°C) within thirty minutes from collection and keep it in a refrigerator at 40° (4°C) the bacteria count may be acceptably low for up to two days. To be on the safe side, it is a best management practice to regularly sample colostrum handled like this. Have it tested for bacteria in a laboratory.

OKAY TO FEED UP TO SIX TO SEVEN DAYS

Chilling colostrum rapidly immediately after it is harvested is one key to extended shelf life. The standard is down to 60° within thirty minutes. At this temperature the generation time is extended out to 150 minutes. If you start with good cow preparation in the parlor and clean, sanitized milker cans this can mean a really low bacteria count initially.

Then, add a preservative at collection time. One preservative with which we have considerable experience is potassium sorbate. A 50 percent solution added at the rate of 10 ml/2 quarts and mixed in thoroughly extends the generation time ten times. At 60° this means extending the time for coliform bacteria to double from 150 to 1500 minutes. See www.atticacows.com in the Calf Facts section for directions for using this preservative. Other preservatives probably will work to achieve acceptably low bacteria counts; I just do not have data in hand in order to describe their use.

The routine here is: clean teats, clean collection bucket, add preservative immediately, chill to 60° within 30 minutes, store in refrigerator at 40° or below.

OKAY TO FEED UP TO EIGHT TO TEN DAYS

If you plan to push the shelf life of colostrum out to eight to ten days accept that you will have to heat treat it. Heat treating or pasteurizing drastically reduces the pathogens in colostrum. Guidelines for pasteurizing colostrum are posted at www.atticacows.com in the Calf Facts section as “Colostrum Pasteurization.”

The keys to making pasteurization of colostrum work are:

- Start with clean colostrum
- Keep the pasteurizer clean and in good operating condition
- 60 minutes at 140° with constant agitation
- Chill rapidly to 60°
- Store in clean sanitized containers
- Store at 40° or less

OKAY TO FEED AT LEAST EIGHT TO TEN DAYS

Start with pasteurized colostrum that is processed according to the keys listed above. Then, add the preservative as it comes out of the pasteurizer mixing it in thoroughly. These bacteria counts can be as low as 100 cfu/ml even at the end of a week.

SERIOUS, BIG TIME SHELF LIFE – FREEZE IT!

The keys to effectively freeze colostrum and have a low bacteria count when thawed and fed are:

- Start with clean colostrum
- Store in clean, sanitized containers
- Chill to 60° within one-half hour – may require chilling before going into the freezer!
- Store at 0° for up to one year

Thanks to Dr. Sandra Godden, “Colostrum Management for Dairy Calves,” presentation at Cornell Summer Dairy Institute, July 3, 2007 for the background information on colostrum bacteria counts under selected storage conditions.

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 to **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 Resource menu, select Calf Management Newsletter. Of special interest may be Calf Notes 122: Calculating ME in milk and milk replacers and Calf Notes 123: Cost of feeding milk replacer at www.calfnotes.com.

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