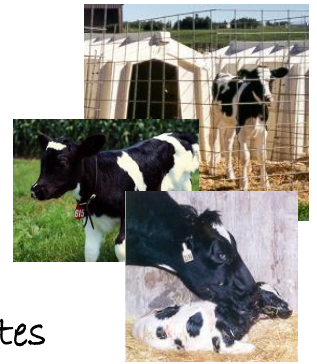


Calving Ease

February 2018

By Sam Leadley of Attica Veterinary Associates



Consistency Matters!

- Consistency promotes better health and growth.
- Calf care people are the base for consistent care.
- Consistent time, especially for feeding.
- Consistent feeding, especially temperature, volume and solids level.
- See the Calf Care Consistency Checklist [HERE](#).

Consistency matters

The time from birth to about 3 weeks of age should be a special focus for consistency of care. Consistency in all aspects of care promotes good closure of the esophageal groove when drinking milk. And, consistent care supports timely abomasal emptying. This movement of partially digested milk, in turn, reduces the chances of infections in the abomasum and promotes efficient digestion. Compared to these neonatal calves, variations in feeds, feeding and routine care probably present less stress as calves get closer to 6 to 8 weeks of age. If choices must be made about resources for consistent care the babies need to have the highest priority.

“Who” is a key factor in providing consistent care.

Our goal should be to have the same person caring for the same calves as much as possible. If more than 1 person works each shift, consider dividing the calves into groups with the same person assigned to the same group all the time.

Why the emphasis on people? First, our interaction with the calves can be consistent. Believe it or not, even with large numbers, calves become accustomed to their calf care person. They recognize the way we walk, our mannerisms and our voice. Watch the way calves respond differently to the part-time person that fills in on the primary person’s day off. Thus, with consistent interaction with the calf and the same calf care person stress levels are low and a “normal” set of behaviors is established.

Second, a good deal of a person’s ability to notice a departure from “normal” behavior for a calf depends on frequent close contact with the calf. When caring for 100 calves full-time I saw each calf 3 times for the AM feeding (both milk and water) and 3 more times for the PM feeding. When you add grain feeding and other routine tasks there were 2 more contacts every day. Caring for these calves 6 days each week meant that I saw each of them close to 50 times a week.

I knew what was “normal.” I could easily recall that #2318, a twin, started out life as a zestful drinker while her twin, 2319, pattered around cleaning up her milk from day one. When a calf went off feed (that is, did not vacuum up her milk ration) she stood out like Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer.

Consistent Time

We all know how mammals, like people, are sensitive to time schedules. If coffee-break is at 10:00 folks start to get restless at 9:55 anticipating a change in behavior. Baby calves learn the routines very quickly.

The sound of you at their pens at an odd time of day provokes few changes in behavior. But, show up at the routine feeding time and the whole crowd is up telling you to feed them first. We think these responses are tied to eating behavior (cleaning up their portion), efficient closure of the esophageal groove (important to shunt milk directly to the abomasum – 4th stomach compartment) and healthy gastro-intestinal movement (abomasal emptying, regular movement of contents in both small and large intestines).

Consistent milk/milk replacer feeding! Time? Try to feed milk at the same times each day. I don't think a few minutes either way makes much difference. However, variations over 30 minutes should be examined to see if greater consistency could be achieved.

Consistent temperature, volume and solids content

One sign of good intestinal health is the consistent pattern of abomasal emptying. Delayed movement of abomasal contents may encourage the undesirable growth of bacteria. Coliforms and clostridials are examples of these bacteria that can grow at excessively high rates in high pH conditions in the abomasum. How to encourage “normal” abomasal emptying?

Consistent volume. A cup of milk (about 4 ounces) either way should not be an issue. Of course there are times when we want to increase or decrease the feeding rate. When changes are required by protocol, I recommend making the change in gradual steps. I moved my calves up from 2 to 3 to 4 quarts per feeding in 1 pint steps (e.g., up to 2.5qts per feeding on Monday, up to 3qts on Thursday).

Consistent temperature. It's easy to measure with a rapid-read probe thermometer. I fed from 30-gallon waste containers. If you poke one of these thermometers through a small square of Styrofoam packing it will float in the milk/milk replacer to monitor temperature. If you are feeding from a tank just run a couple of quarts into a feeding pail and check the temperature.

Consistent solids. A Brix refractometer is an easy tool to use to monitor milk solids [Brix + 2 = solids%]. With milk replacer there is no need to measure the mixed solution – just weigh the powder and measure the water accurately.

Consistent delivery of CLEAN water and calf starter grain

The availability of clean water and calf starter grain is essential for good calf health and growth.

Thanks to Merck Animal Health for sponsoring this issue.

For more information see <https://www.merck-animal-health-usa.com/species/cattle>

Remember to search for “Calves with Sam” blog for profit tips for calf rearing.