

Calf Health Management

Minimising health threats

The fundamental feature to disease prevention in calves is proper management. Although vaccines and other drugs may seem like a fix when it comes to respiratory diseases or diarrhoea, most outbreaks stems from problems related to colostrum management, nutrition, housing or hygiene and sanitation.

Core of disease control programs

1. Removing the source of infection from the calf's environment
2. Removing the calf from a contaminated environment
3. Increasing the immunity of the calf
4. Reducing stress on the calf

(Radostits and Acres, 1980)

Focus on the following strategies to reduce the gastrointestinal tract and energy metabolism excessive exposure to pathogens and provide adequate resistance in the calf.

1. Pre calving care

Ensure that you have a comprehensive vaccination program in place to protect the herd from any common diseases. It is an investment that can return significant dividends if implemented together with good management practices.

Transition feeding- The idea of leed feeding (transitional feeding) is to ensure the rumen is set up right to avoid any disruptions in their feed intake post calving, aim for quality colostrum production and to maintain required mineral nutrition to avoid metabolic problems such as milk fever.

Design a maternity pen which is comfortable and dry for cows to calve with adequate spacing to prevent disease outbreaks. A clean calving area can reduce the risk of Crypto.

2. Colostrum: Timing, Quality and Volume

Colostrum contains a range of nutrients and other non-nutritive factors such as hormones, bioactive and growth factors to help with the development of the calf. As calves are born with no immunity against diseases- they rely entirely on the passive immunity through colostrum. Development of

the gastrointestinal tract and energy metabolism in calves is also enhanced with appropriate colostrum feeding. Remember the 4 Qs: Quick, Quality, Quantity and sQueaky clean.

It is also good practice on farms to keep basic records as it is critical for troubleshooting calf health problems.

3. Cleaning and disinfection: feeding equipment, pens

The most common cause of scours is contamination of manure that calves have access to. Effective cleaning of equipment, bedding and pens to remove these organic material can significantly reduce reinfection rates in calves.

4. Housing

Provide calves with a comfortable, clean and dry space that is appropriately ventilated with easy access to feed and water. Doing so will ensure that less energy will be spent keeping calf warm and more directed to growth.

5. Nutrition

Adequate calf nutrition is critical for host immunity. Energy deprived calves are more likely to have increased morbidity and mortality.

Contact us to discuss your calf feeding needs

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