

Calving Ease

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Mixing Milk Replacer

Let's start out our conversation about this topic by reminding ourselves that calves thrive on consistency. One element of this consistent care is their milk replacer. How do we arrange our work to produce high quality consistent milk replacer every feeding, every day?

Follow the manufacturer's instructions

Each manufacturer has options for both ingredients and processes when making milk replacer. Depending on the choices that are made by the manufacturer an individual milk replacer will have relatively unique mixing requirements to achieve the best quality reconstituted product.

The most important of these recommendations is the mixing temperature for the powder. Recommendations may be as low as 110° and as high as 150°. Using excessively cold water may result in incomplete mixing and uneven dispersion of nutrients. Using excessively hot water most often results in uneven mixing of the fat. At extremely high temperatures the denaturing of whey protein could affect digestibility of the product.

Unfortunately, some manufacturers have confusing mixing instructions about how much water and powder to use. The minimum concentration of dry matter in milk replacer for young dairy replacement heifer calves should be 12.5 percent. Some instructions correctly tell you to mix the powder with some water and after blending add enough more water to arrive at the desired volume. This works well – you end up with about 12.5 percent solids. The incorrect directions tell you to add the powder to the final volume of water. For example, add 8 ounces of powder to 2 quarts of water. Instead of ending up with 2 quarts of 12.5 percent solids you get more than 2 quarts of an 11.6 percent mix.

If you are mixing milk replacer for one calf at a time either way every time the difference in concentration doesn't matter since the calf drinks the entire batch anyway. However, if you are mixing in bulk using incorrect instructions and then feeding by volume (e.g., two-quart feeding) the calves get less than the 8 ounces of powder that was the intended amount. And, if more than one person mixes milk replacer there is a good chance that they may not use the same mixing methods which results in inconsistent feeding.

Make Mixing Easy

- Have a written recipe. This is simple and easy. So many calves, use so much powder and fill container to "x" level. Many folks have a dry-erase board where the mixing amounts for the next feeding are marked down at the end of each feeding along with the numbers of the calves that didn't eat right and need special attention.

- Use scales to measure milk replacer powder. I am guilty of not using scales back in the 1990's. However, the past nine years of farm visits has convinced me that there is no easier way to measure milk replacer powder than with a scale. 1. Hang pail on the scale. 2. Scoop in powder. 3. Stop when the needle hits the right place. 4. Dump contents of pail into water. Using a scale has the added benefit of being much more accurate than estimating powder by volume (that is, using a cup or scoop).
- Calibrate containers rather than estimating water volume. If you use a tank, take time one day to fill it with water in graduated known quantities – mark the tank at each step. Choose steps that experience shows make sense on your operation.

If you use large garbage pails, find a piece of 1.5-inch PVC pipe that is about one foot longer than the pail is tall. Glue a cap on each end. Put it into the garbage pail. Now, add water in graduated known quantities – mark the pipe at each step (for example, in two-gallon steps). In order to get a permanent mark use a file to roughen the PVC pipe surface slightly so that a ear-tag pen will make a permanent black line. Now, if you have a 20-gallon pail but only need 12 gallons of mix you can mix your powder-water slurry and fill to the 12-gallon line on your homemade calibration stick. Remember to wash the stick after each use.

I often had to make up small batches of milk replacer for sick calves and such. I made a calibrated PVC stick from 1-inch pipe for a 5-gallon pail calibrated by 1- gallon steps. Even if I was not the person doing the job I knew that anyone could run water into a pail up to the desired level on the stick without too much guessing.

Use a thermometer to get the right temperature mix. If you have a temperature gauge on your mixer faucet that's great. If you don't have one and you use a garden hose or milker hose from the parlor to transfer water from your mixer faucet try inserting a rapid read thermometer into this line at a 30 degree angle. That way at least you start with the right temperature water. Especially in cold weather try to avoid using your hands to estimate temperature – they are notoriously inaccurate due to the environmental chill factor.

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** calvingease@rochester.rr.com.
A limited number of back issues may be accessed on the Internet at either www.atticacows.com or www.calfnotes.com and clicking on the link, Calving Ease.

Our thanks to Alpharma for supporting this issue of Calving Ease.

Just a reminder that the 2009 Dairy Calf & Heifer National Conference is coming up:

March 24th- 27th - 2008
Tuscon, Arizonia

For More information or for the conference schedule go to:
<http://www.calfandheifer.org/2009conference.htm>