

CALVING EASE

February 1995 (Revised Jan '04)

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Teaching a Calf to Drink

The hardest thing on a ranch, I think,
Is trying to teach a calf to drink.

You pull and haul, get her head in a pail;
She'll stand there and twist and wiggle her tail;
And the very first thing, *kerplunk* goes her nose-
And most of the milk goes on your clothes.

Hang onto your patience, your teeth you must grit;
If you can't hold your temper, you might as well quit...
For old Mother Nature, whose methods don't fail,
Never meant for a calf to drink from a pail.

Back her into a corner, straddle her neck;
She won't damage you much, you're already a wreck!
Just give her a finger, and maybe, with luck,
That little old rascal will start in to suck.

Pick up your bucket and push her head down,
Then away you go again, around and around;
Just do this a week with your back in a kink,
And maybe by then you'll teach her to drink.

This rural rhyme appeared recently in Country Woman and was credited to several readers who recalled reciting this poem as schoolchildren. Thanks to Barb Sturm for this contribution.

Mixing Milk Replacers

Question: What's our goal in feeding calves?

Answer: Adequate and consistent nutrition.

Question: What's that got to do with mixing milk replacers?

Answer: Errors in mixing practices can cause milk replacer content to vary from calf to calf - to be inconsistent.

Most common errors in mixing milk replacer

1. When the "weather outside is frightful" we want to make our milk replacer delightful. So, we jack up the mixing temperature. If the mixing temperature is too high (roughly much over 120 degrees F.)

we stand a good chance of separating the fat from the instantized beads in the milk replacer. End result? Fat separates, rises to top (clear layer on top, forms scum when chilled, sticks to buckets).

If feeding only one calf, fat ends up stuck to bucket rather than in calf. If mixing for 2 or more calves, first calf gets lots of fat, last calf gets very little. Inconsistent feeding.

2. "I'm short on warm water and this darn powder doesn't mix well; I'll just whip it up good and it will mix okay. Not true! Too low mixing temperatures (roughly much under 100 degrees F.) lead to lumpiness - industry folks call this poor particle dispersion. This "lumpiness" cannot be solved by more vigorous mixing. Excess mixing just causes over-foaming and fat particle separation.

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Notice how you get the same problem with either too hot or too cold mixing temperatures?

In addition, a University of Illinois dairy scientist, James Drackley, is quoted in a recent Dairy Herd Management as saying that this fat dispersion problem decreases the calf's utilization of energy, also.

So, What should I do to avoid these errors?

Best answer is follow label instructions. Next best answer is to stick to mixing temperatures between 110 and 115 degrees F. Many of us are spending extra money for higher fat content milk replacers, especially to feed during cold, winter months. What a waste to lose this advantage by not monitoring mixing temperature carefully enough!

Tennis Balls and Calves

Nearly everyone has had a calf with a tennis-ball size protrusion from her navel. What is that unsightly thing? Dr. J.S. Britt, writing in Dairy Herd Management, points out that two major alternatives need to be considered. One is a navel hernia. Usually the enlargement moves in and out of the hole in the stomach wall. He comments, "Normally the hole in the stomach wall through which these structures [refers here to umbilical cord] pass (the navel) closes soon after birth. ... The hole in the stomach wall through which the hernia occurs may close by the time the calf is 2 months old. If it does not close, the hernia can be repaired." Your veterinarian can advise you as to the timing and method most appropriate for this animal.

The other alternative is an abscess at the navel. This feels like a hard mass and does not move easily back up into the calf's stomach cavity. It frequently contains white puss. Our vets usually help us drain the abscess, recommending both flushing the abscess and placing the animal on antibiotics. Moral? Same appearance, different causes, different solutions.

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