

CALVING EASE

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SPRING AND NEWBORN CARE

April showers bring May flowers. Remember that one? Let's remember also that April is still a relatively cold month in the Northeastern US. The normal average temperatures for Buffalo and Rochester for February through May are: Feb=25, Mar=34, Apr=45 and May=57. Even though it really is warmer in April than back in February and March, calves still need cold weather care in April.

Another way of looking at cold is a common energy measure, Heating Degree Days. That's calculated by finding the difference between 65° and the average of the high and low temperature on a given day. What's that for an April day? High is 50 and low is 30. The average is $50 + 30$ divided by 2 or 40. $65 - 40 = 25$ degree days.

In calf terms, during the April day above a calf has to use body stores of energy to keep up her core body temperature all 24 hours. It never got up to 60-65 degrees where she no longer uses body energy to keep warm. For comparison these are the average Heating Degree Days experienced in Western New York: Feb=40, Mar=31, Apr=19, May=9, Jun=2. Until we consistently get days with degree-day ratings of 10 or below young calves consuming primarily milk or milk replacer need extra rations.

Keep feeding extra milk or milk replacer in April

Most of us figured out during the coldest part of the winter that the calves must have high dry matter intakes to survive. "High" here means more than the usual summer ration of one 8 ounce cup (1/2 pound) of milk replacer reconstituted as two quarts fed twice a day. During the summer months this feeding rate will supply the maintenance needs of an average Holstein calf plus allow her to gain about one-half pound daily. In April weather (average temperature = 45, average heating degree days = 19) this 1/2 pound feeding rate twice a day probably will not even meet the 85-90 pound calf's maintenance needs; nothing is left over for growth (I have assumed a 20-20 milk replacer mixed according to bag instructions).

One way to get extra dry matter into young calves is to mix a little extra milk replacer powder with the same amount of water. For example, just mixing 10 ounces to make two quarts of milk replacer and feeding at the same rate (2 quarts AM and PM) can move a calf from weight loss to low rate of gain.

The other simple way to get extra dry matter into young calves is to feed more volume. By adding just one extra pint to both the AM and PM feeding with milk replacer mixed according to bag instructions a calf can move from a negative to positive growth status.

Combining the two approaches works much better in April conditions. Feeding the extra pint AM and PM of milk replacer mixed with the extra two ounces of powder for two quarts is predicted to move a calf from weight loss to an estimated 0.8 pound of gain a day.

Care at birth essential for later growth

Calves must have a good start if they are going to be capable of responding to good nutrition in subsequent weeks. Remember the newborn rules:

- Get her up.
- Get her dry.
- Get her fed.

Generally it makes sense to do these jobs in the order in which they are listed above. But, we have all worked with calves where we've done the jobs in just the reverse order. Why emphasize getting her up and standing? Just getting into the standing position apparently triggers the release of hormones that affect a calf's metabolic rate. Getting her up is sort of like jump-starting her metabolic engine. Zoom, it's off and running at full speed. Even if we have to get her up repeatedly in the time it takes to dip her navel, put in an ear tag (or ID her somehow), and dry her off the outcome is worth the extra effort.

Get her dry. Regardless of the environmental temperature, the calf will adjust better to the surrounding air temperature with a dry, fluffy hair coat. The chances are very high in April that temperatures at birth are 40 degrees and below. If you have been keeping a supply of old bath towels for drying off calves don't stop now. April calves are experiencing cold conditions. A good drying session will give each calf a better start in life. Use enough dry towels and vigorous rubbing to get a fluffy hair coat. That lets her use body energy stores for growth rather than drying her own coat at birth.

Get her fed. It's an old and familiar litany. Feed plenty of clean, good quality colostrum as soon as possible after birth. When combined with coat drying and getting a calf standing, this step of feeding her is a tried and true formula for getting calves off to a healthy start.

Calf raisers tip

This past month I have seen two calf feeding systems with three pails; one for grain, one for water and one for milk. In one system with hutch housing the two-pail bucket rack in the front of the pen is used for milk and water. The grain pail is in a rack inside the hutch. The other system has water and grain at the front of the pen in the regular two-pail rack. The third pail for milk which sits inside a section of drain pipe is located inside the pen in a front corner held in place with a section of drain pipe (sits into this) and a zip tie to hold the handle to the fence. The calves do not pull these out – the caretaker uses side nippers to cut the tie before the pail can come out of the pipe section. In both cases calves had free choice water.

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** either 585-591-2660 (Attica Vet Assoc. office) or 585-343-8128 (Offhaus Farms Office) or **FAX** (585-591-2898) or **e-mail** sleadley@frontiernet.net or pams91@2ki.net . A limited number of back issues may be accessed on the Internet at www.calnotes.com and clicking on the link, Calving Ease.

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