

# CALVING EASE

May 1997 (Revised Dec '03)

Sam Leadley (Attica Veterinary Associates) and Pam Sojda (Offhaus Farms)

## Heifer Identification

All of us have laughed at the description of a heifer as "the black and white one with a white spot on her forehead." (Or some other similarly useless description if you have colored breed cattle.)

Identifying heifer calves immediately after birth is important to many calf care persons. Both Sam and Pam have different newborn care routines for males and females. For example, the better quality colostrum is fed to the females. Also, we give selenium injections to heifers we plan to raise but not to bulls we expect to sell.

### Permanent Metal ID Ear Tag

We like to get the permanent metal ID ear tag in a heifer as soon as we can. Remember, though, that it's important to get that metal ID tag in correctly. It is supposed to be a lifetime tag. That means placing it closely enough to the heifer's head so it has less chance of snagging on something and pulling out.

Equally important is leaving enough space at the fold of the tag for ear growth. One rule of thumb is to leave enough space between the fold of the tag and the ear so you could insert a common lead pencil. That much space will accommodate ear growth and still insure a firm seat in the ear.

### Larger, easier-to-read tags

Two of the most common practices seem to be either assign a temporary heifer number or use the adult barn number. Jane Beswick snaps in small orange tags marked with the same two digits that appear last on the metal ID tag. For example, 21WZE3927 gives Jane a #27 heifer tag. In her 400 cow herd, heifers with the

same orange tag numbers are a long way apart in size so they don't get confused. Other folks just buy a numbered series to tag their heifers.

Other dairies prefer to assign and tag heifers with the adult barn numbers at birth. We will admit that the large plastic tags on an especially small calf do look awfully big. Some of us find it convenient to have on hand a metal tag series that matches the barn numbers we want to assign. For example, if we are tagging animals with barn numbers starting with #100, we get a box of metal tags that start with 100 such as 21WZE2100. This matching between plastic and metal tags takes more advance planning in larger herds with four digit barn numbers. Sam and Pam get the metal tags a case at a time to insure the metal and plastic tag match for at least a year.

Pam marks the backs of the tags with information about the heifer (for example, sire, dam, birth date). She finds it helpful when the calves are in hutches to know if a calf is a twin. She makes a "T" on the face of the tag to remind her that this smaller calf started as a small calf; it's not small because it is sick.

### **Day-to-Day Management**

Easy-to-read heifer identification plays an important part in simplifying every calf raiser's life. If you have more than one person working with heifers, IDs are essential for dependable communication. Leaving notes about the "mostly black heifer with a white rump in weaning pen #2" is a formula for frustration. Further, if you use antibiotics, you are responsible for residue control - a written record of which animal received the drug and when. We really don't have too much difficulty with identifying heifers while they are still in hutches. It's when they move into group pens that big, black numbers on tags pay for themselves. Years ago we used to use only metal tags on heifers. It took at least two people to restrain a sick three-hundred pound heifer to read that little tag prior to treating her. Now with better ID we can medicate or vaccinate the proper animals with just one person.

### **Calf Feeder's Tip**

Nancy Spanski, Cornell Cooperative Extension Dairy Educator, writing about colostrum management reminds us that all freezers are not equal. "For long term storage, freezing is the best alternative. It can be frozen up to a year without significant loss of Ig levels. *Note that frost free freezers shorten colostrum storage life since they go through freeze-thaw cycles that allow the colostrum to thaw.* [Emphasis added, Eds.] That old manual-defrost freezer does have a use after all.

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](mailto:sleadley@frontiernet.net) or [pams91@2ki.net](mailto:pams91@2ki.net) . A limited number of back issues may be accessed on the Internet at [www.calfnotes.com](http://www.calfnotes.com) and clicking on the link, Calving Ease.