

CALVING EASE

June 2002

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

Are we achieving our goals? (Part 1: Measuring and Recording)

Answering this question means we must consider measuring or collecting data. Then, we have to record these facts. That's the subject of this letter. Finally, we must summarize, analyze and interpret our findings in order answer the question. That's the subject of July's letter.

RULES FOR MEASURING

Know why you are measuring

Specific questions are the most helpful when deciding on collecting facts. Have a heifer enterprise question in mind before starting to collect information. For example, "How frequently are heifers being treated for respiratory illness?" Or, "How well is the colostrum management program working to achieve successful passive transfer in calves?"

Keep measurement practical

There is a cost related to every fact collected. Unnecessary costs can be avoided by closely tying together our questions and the information. Choosing carefully among all possible facts and selecting those really needed can save both time and money.

For example, assume we want to know the rate of passive transfer failure in two-day old calves. Once the blood samples are drawn on our calves it's possible to measure several characteristics. However, each test adds expense. But, in this case we only need one characteristic in order to answer the question. That is, we measure just maternal antibodies in the blood and forget the rest.

Integrate measurement with other jobs

As often as possible integrate measuring with another management practice already in place. For example, if we have heifers in lockups for vaccinating, it's easy to go behind them with a Hipometer® and collect weights. Or, if we are moving heifers on a trailer we have the opportunity to observe them close up long enough to assign body scores.

Match precision of measurement to our purpose

A lab test is available to measure the antibody content of colostrum. It's accurate to about plus or minus five grams of antibody (IgG) per liter. Compared to one hundred tests using a Colostrometer® (accurate to about ten to fifteen grams per liter) this laboratory test is about nine times as expensive. Now, if all we need to know is whether or not the colostrum is of very poor

quality (that is, low IgG content) the Colostrometer value is close enough. We can sort out the really poor stuff for bull calves or feeding heifers on the second day.

Other examples? We estimate maternal antibody levels in two-day old calves' blood. It can be done with a refractometer at one-fifth the cost of a much more accurate laboratory test. Or, we estimate bacterial contamination of colostrum using only 1:1,000 and 1:100,000 dilutions. This is done at less than half the cost of additional and higher dilutions.

RULES FOR RECORDING

Preserve it

Information has to be preserved in order to be accessible. With today's technology the alternatives for preserving information are numerous. Try to choose forms that are affordable. And, that provide easy access to all the persons that work with heifers. A "low-tech" example is writing down the ID numbers of heifers as they are vaccinated. Or, higher tech is a dated list of heifers to be vaccinated made from a dairy records program (e.g., PCDart, DC305). As we give the injections we check off the heifer numbers. This paper then goes into a binder for "permanent" storage. It was easy to make the list, it was dated, we added the check marks and it's easy to access. If we are "hi-tech" we might have this list downloaded onto a Palm organizer, check off the numbers electronically at the heifer pen and then upload the list to the farm computer later. Plenty of training involved with this last alternative.

Always have two copies

I have always kept four copies of calf birth dates – one on a barn sheet that records births by dam and calf, one in the computer and one more on a calendar in the calf barn and one more on the back of the each calf's left ear tag. Even with all these copies calves have managed to disappear! Rather than toss out paper copies of lists once they are keyed into a computer, put them in a box, notebook or a drawer for a while. When discrepancies show up later in the computer files the original list is still available to sort out the mess. It should go without saying that everyone needs to back up computer files regularly on permanent media (floppies, external hard disc, or paper).

Calf Feeders' Tips

Use wheels when collecting water. Many calf operations feed milk and water in the same pail. The water is dumped out prior to milk feeding at least twice a day. In some facilities it is not feasible to just dump the water. That is, it must be collected and then taken to an appropriate spot to dump. Adirondak Farms uses a two-wheeled bag or barrel cart with a thirty-gallon barrel attached with bungee cords. The top is cut out of the barrel. As the worker walks along trailing the cart one water pail after another is dumped into the barrel. The two-wheeled cart with large rubber tires is light. It maneuvers easily in tight quarters. And, even when the barrel contains a lot of water it is still easy to dump into a floor drain.

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** leadley@frontiernet.net or pams91@2ki.net. A limited number of back issues may be accessed on the Internet at www.calfnotes.com and clicking on the link, Calving Ease.