

CALVING EASE

JUNE 2003

Sam Leadley of Attica Veterinary Associates & Pam Sojda of Offhaus Farms

LITTLE SLIPUPS ADD UP

Are there little things that happen that provide the opportunity for quality calf care to slip by us? Let's examine three of them. All of these examples come from observations in calf and cow barns in the past couple of years.

The do it "right away" slipup:

Equipment needed is one person. The intent in the statement, "Feed the calf her colostrum right away," may be that the colostrum be fed as soon as possible after birth. This protocol may be interpreted as, "As soon as I have finished milking this group of cows," or "Before I go home at the end of my shift." Or, the protocol that calls for chilling freshly harvested colostrum right away may be interpreted as, "As soon as we are done milking the fresh/sick cow group," or "After we get the parlor set up to wash."

One solution is to be sure there are not conflicting orders. For example, if it is urgent to get the parlor wash started immediately after milking the fresh/sick group the parlor person can't be out feeding colostrum at the same time. Also, setting quantitative goals may be better than just saying "right away." Your goal might be to get colostrum fed to four out of five calves within an hour after birth. That can be recorded and summarized to evaluate success in contrast to the more vague "right away."

For colostrum cooling you may have to be innovative. If milkers don't have time to handle fresh colostrum and get it into a refrigerator promptly think about bringing the cold to the colostrum. Freeze containers of ice and drop them into the fresh colostrum right in the milker buckets. Clean plastic milk or soft drink containers work well for this.

On a cross-cultural note, we need to remember that for a person coming from a Hispanic culture the idea of "right away" is often different from the meaning we Anglos give it. The exactness of time is conditioned by one's culture. Hispanic cultures tend to have a more casual interpretation of time than ours. And, we have special cases in our own culture where time is rather elastic. Remember the

last time the vet said he/she would be there for herd check at 10:00 AM? Remember when you were going to be in the house to get ready to go to a wedding no later than 5:00 PM?

The wet nursing bottle on floor slipup:

Equipment needed is a five-gallon pail of milk or milk replacer ready to feed, one nursing bottle and nipple, several hungry calves and a barn floor. The procedure starts with filling the first bottle to be fed by dipping the bottle in the five-gallon pail. The full bottle is set on a solid surface, the floor, and the nipple attached. The bottle is fed. The bottle is refilled by dipping it into the pail that used to contain four and one-half gallons of clean milk. Now after rinsing the manure off the bottom of the nursing bottle the milk is contaminated with coliform bacteria. The process of fill, set on floor, attach nipple, feed calf is repeated. The coliform contamination level in the milk rises each time the dirty bottle is rinsed off.

Before you say, "Oh, I would never do that," stop and think about attaching a nipple to a nursing bottle. The bottle needs to be on a solid surface. The floor is right there, very handy. I know how easy it is to do this because I've done it! What's the solution? Bring a five or ten quart pail out to set the bottle into between calves. Even if you fill the bottle by dipping you still have a clean place to set the bottle to attach the nipple.

The dip a dirty bottle into milk slipup:

Even if the bottles are not set on the floor they often get pretty dirty while we are feeding calves. Dipping them into the milk just rinses off many, many coliform bacteria into the milk to be fed to the next calf. Better yet is to set the bottle inside a small pail. Then, pour milk into it from a larger bucket.

The dip the feeding pail into milk slipup:

Equipment needed is a large container of milk (5, 10, 20 gallon), one milk feeding pail (5 or 10 quarts), and lots of hungry calves. The procedure starts by removing a soiled milk-feeding pail from the pen feeding rack. This pail is dipped into the milk and replaced in the pen feeding rack. The pick up, dip, and feed process is repeated. With each dip with a contaminated pail the coliform concentration in the milk goes higher and higher. Imagine a situation where five-gallon pails were used to carry milk. Feeding pails were used to dip out the milk two quarts at a time. Nearly every eighth, ninth and tenth calf has scours. Solution? Either pour from the pail or use a clean dipper or scoop.

The dirty hands from the parlor slipup:

Equipment needed is one milker bucket of warm, fresh colostrum, six two-quart nursing bottles and nipples, one pair of dirty hands from the parlor. Now let's be honest about the "dirty" hands. It's not dirt like in a flowerbed. Politely stated, the dirt is cow feces. The procedure starts with setting the milker bucket on the floor near the rack where the nursing bottles are drying. Now if I had to carry six bottles at

once from one place to another what's the easiest way to carry them? Sure, just stick fingers in the tops and carry three in one hand and three more in the other. A good dose of cow _____ ends up in each one. Then after filling the nipples have to be attached. Just turn the nipple inside out with our dirty hands and snap it into place on top of the bottle. More "dirt" in the colostrum. Solution? Pull off the dirty nitrile gloves and put on a fresh clean pair. Or, without gloves, wash your hands clean enough so you would feel comfortable using them to eat a sandwich.

Calf Feeder's Tip

We have to treat some sick calves with antibiotics. It's important to keep good written records of which calves are treated and the nature of the treatment. It's also convenient to have information right at each calf's hutch or pen. Which antibiotic was used? How many treatments have been given? Think about using colored plastic ties fastened to the pen or hutch. One color = one antibiotic. One mark with a permanent marker (e.g., ear tag pen) = one treatment. Thanks go to the health staff at Calf Source in Wisconsin.