

CALVING EASE

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Saturday Night Special

Is this about cheap handguns? Nope, guess again! This is a follow-up on a presentation by Dr. Stoddard (Perry Vet Clinic) in April on pneumonia. One of the causes of pneumonia he mentioned was milk in the lungs. Most of our conversation at the April meeting focused on techniques using a tube feeder. That is, how to prevent running milk into the trachea (alias windpipe).

Since then we've been part of several conversations about other ways calves get milk into their tracheas. Want to know what we guessed is the most common cause? Saturday night specials! You know, the old, worn-out nipples that run a quarter-inch stream of milk when you tip the bottle upside-down. We call them "Saturday night specials" because folks use them to feed bull calves on the weekend that were born too late to sell last week. Big, hungry bulls that can knock back two quarts in less than a minute.

But, what happens when we jam that same nipple on a bottle and feed colostrum to a newborn heifer? Before much colostrum is eaten she is coughing and gagging. Cause? Too much milk too fast. The first signal of this "too much, too fast?" She stops sucking and lets go of the nipple. Then she coughs - sounds like a four-pack-a-day smoker! A different nipple (not necessarily brand new but with a slower flow) is a lot less expensive than starting a calf off with pneumonia.

Myth vs. Reality

There's only one right way to raise calves, My way!

Garbage! Sure, nearly all of us agree on our goal in calf raising - to have live, healthy and rapidly growing calves at reasonable costs. But, dream on if you think there is only one set of methods to reach that goal.

As calf raisers, we are all different and vary in our work styles and preferences for organizing our calf enterprise. Our circumstances are not the same (for example, differences in breeding, farm-specific pathogens).

What really counts, clearly, is sticking to a few basic principles that encourage the rapid and complete development of the heifer's immune system. Sam identified three of these in a talk he gave last January as:

- (1) Reduce stress on her whenever practical,
- (2) Vaccinate her for known pathogens, and
- (3) Provide timely and appropriate intervention when she is ill.

In this letter, let's look at reducing stress. Remember, that's both stress at one time and total stress during the first 8 to 12 weeks. Just in the area of nutrition we can actively manage calves to cut stress.

Too Little Feed None of us intentionally underfeed calves. But, think about this - has this ever happened to your calves? You are bucket-training a calf. You start out with two quarts in a bucket. One pint goes on the calf, one pint goes on you, one pint goes into the calf, and we leave one pint in the bottom and say, "Well, that's enough for this time." If this is repeated for three or four feedings in a row, what's the calf's total milk intake in two days? Two quarts! We don't need the stress of short-term partial starvation. Isn't it better to start with three quarts in the bucket?

Too Rapid Changes in Feed We have all heard the saying, "When they get hungry enough, they'll eat it." It's true. But, "hungry enough" may be a mild form of starvation leading to hormonal changes that could take anywhere from several days to more than a week to reverse. That kind of stress is not compatible with achieving 2 pound/day gains and 23-24 month freshening goals. Feeding changes can be spread out over time to reduce stress.

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.calfnotes.com and clicking on the link, Calving Ease.