

CALVING EASE

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HOT WEATHER AND FLIES

Every year we hope not to see evidence of screw worm flies. Finding their larva growing on a calf's rump doesn't settle one's stomach. It's a distasteful situation. But, early detection and consistent treatment does pay off.

Now, what are the symptoms? At a distance, the calf's rump looks as if the hair is rough and uneven. Closer inspection reveals patches of white maggots - the screw worm larva - feeding on the calf's skin. Treatment always includes removing the maggots from the calf and washing away the dead tissue. We use either rubber gloves or an OB sleeve. That keeps us clean and our stomach in place. Plain water will work. We add a mild disinfectant. These areas need to be washed clean at least daily until no new maggots are visible.

Some folks use no post-wash treatment at all. We use hydrogen peroxide as a rinse when we have completed scrubbing the affected area. Commercial sprays are available, as well. It's well to check skin areas several inches away from the obvious infestation - especially along the topline of the spine.

Severe cases with considerable skin damage may require extra care. Greasy salves are not recommended. A vanishing cream-type salve will soak into the skin and help reduce the amount of drying and cracking.

Caution: Many of the commercial sprays contain a probable carcinogen called Lindane. Many containers caution against using on calves under 3 months of age. We suggest you be careful; the MSDS recommends avoiding skin contact since Lindane is absorbed through the skin. At least wear rubber gloves and scrub up carefully after done treating the calf.

MYTH VS. REALITY

There's only one right way to raise calves; my way? Myth! Reality says that while calf raising methods may vary a great deal there are a few basic principles that are common to all good programs. In June we talked about the idea of reducing stress. This month we look at another principle. Namely, providing timely and appropriate intervention when a calf is ill. We raise calves in hutches and we are at each hutch at least four times daily. Each visit gives us a chance to look for abnormal behavior or conditions. For example, when we appear this time the calf doesn't get up and her usual behavior is to run out looking for food. Or, the usual "drink two quarts of milk in thirty seconds" is missing and there's milk left in her pail.

Either of these conditions are red flags signalling us to check out this calf. Elevated temperature? Labored breathing? Mucous discharge from nose? Evidence of scouring? Will she drink from a bottle? If bottle fed, does she have to stop and start nursing in order to breathe through her mouth? Difficulty getting up? Eyes bright or dull?

Timely diagnosis can make a difference in two ways. First, the intensity of the treatment can be a lot less if started early. With scours, extra water may be all that's needed if started when the first symptoms appear. Delay may mean more severe dehydration requiring electrolyte feeding. Second, the duration of treatment can be shorter if started early. With respiratory problems, we find delays in diagnosis usually about double the treatment time.

While there are lots of different opinions about what is "appropriate" treatment, the "right" one for us is the treatment that works! Every location seems to have its own unique pathogen profile. Treatments that work in one place do poorly in another. By keeping consistent records of how calves are treated and which treatments work well, we can select "appropriate" ones at least for our two big sicknesses - scours and pneumonia.

Our criteria for "effective" treatments are these. For scours, does the treatment permit the calf to keep gaining weight right straight through the treatment period? If calves lose weight or stand still, we need to look for alternative treatments. Does the scouring calf develop symptoms of respiratory illness within a day or two? If yes, we need to look for alternative scours treatments. For pneumonia, does the treatment result in "near-normal" behavior within 24 hours and not require retreatment one to two weeks later? Does the treated calf keep gaining weight rather than standing still (unthrifty)?

ANOTHER MYTH

Myth: The calves that die are the weak ones; we are better off getting rid of them early.

Reality: The calves that die are the ones overwhelmed by a load of pathogens - bacteria, viruses, parasites.

All calves start life with virtually no immune protection. Therefore, we are often the factor that makes the critical difference between survival and death. How many of our calf deaths can be traced back to mistakes in colostrum feeding? Timing, quality, quantity errors?

No matter how big and healthy a calf is at birth, if pathogens enter her body through an open, untreated navel, she's history. Dipping navels with tincture of iodine is so simple and basic. And, it works! But, the iodine doesn't do us any good in the bottle. How many of our calf deaths can be traced back to mistakes in navel dipping? Not done at all, or ineffective iodine dip, or sloppy application?

Calf Feeder's Tip

What's more difficult than catching a greased pig? Getting a calf to be still long enough to put in a permanent metal ear tag! It's not so much getting the tag in the ear. It's placing it properly to allow for growth. Haven't we all seen the case where the tag was

put in snug to the ear on a newborn? Four months later we have an infection where the ear tries to grow around the tag. What's the right amount of space to leave? We've heard it put this way, "Leave enough room to slip a pencil between the ear and the fold in the tag."

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.