

CALVING EASE

January 1998 (Rev. Dec '03)

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TLC

Everyone has heard of TLC - also known as Tender Loving Care. Testimonials have been given countless times about how TLC is an essential part of effective calf care. Many of us have heard about the calf mortality study that found the lowest level of mortality occurred when the farm wife provided the calf care. The implication was that farm wives are more likely to provide TLC than the dairyman or an employee. Just what is this TLC, anyway? This letter is a "Sam" product so the "I" and "my" refer to Sam.

In my experience, Tender Loving Care (TLC) is the right amount and kind of care given at the right time. As a parent of four sons and grandparent nine times over I'm beginning to get the idea as applied to humans. Our sons got a lot of TLC, especially from Esther, as they grew up and we still extend the same kind of caring to them now as adults. I am watching with interest how our sons and their wives share more of child care than was the case forty years ago when Esther and I had young sons. The point here is that all of us have an opportunity to practice TLC, not just with bovines.

What does it take for me to be effective in giving the right amount and kind of care at the right time? I need to be persistent, perspicacious and predisposed to make the right choices for care.

PERSISTENT

The duration of both observation and care is an essential ingredient in the recipe for TLC. Especially newborns benefit from being observed frequently by the same person. Because I see the same calf four or five times daily I build up a mental image of "normal" behavior - quiet, lively, shy, bold, eats daintily, slops up milk like a hog. With many images piled one on top of another over time it's possible to build a composite picture of an individual calf. My images are sharpest for the smallest calves in hutches. The individual images weaken as the calves are weaned, moved to small pens and then to much larger groups.

Persistent care is important. This is the difference between having calves well bedded consistently rather than having them well bedded now and then. Persistency means giving calf feeding a high enough priority so that the calves have a regular feeding schedule promoting both good eating and digestion. Persistence is the difference between giving the full prescribed course of medication to a calf rather than giving her medication for only a day or two until she "looks better."

PERSPICACIOUS

I don't use this word very much. I assure you it's not a disease or obscure veterinary term. I chose it in order to catch your attention. It simply means that a person is very aware of what he or she sees and hears. Another way of saying this is that a person is acutely perceptive. Being perspicacious is basic when it comes to TLC. People vary a lot in how sensitive or perceptive they are. For example, how

perceptive you are may depend on the environment, how you feel, what's happened yesterday or earlier today, and what you expect to see, hear, smell and touch. It takes lots of effort not only to make note of things but also to recognize what they mean. I've noticed that the more tired I get the less perceptive I am. For example, I probably miss clues to illness more often late in the day than in the morning.

Once in a while I'll have a part-time helper that is not very perceptive. One helper several years ago repeatedly fed milk to empty hutches. When I asked why this was done, he replied that he hadn't noticed the hutch was unoccupied. Whew! I had to ask another helper not wear her Walkman while feeding calves - I'm not certain how much it helped her but when wearing the Walkman she was barely present much less looking carefully at calves as she fed. I believe perceptiveness is related to one's attitude toward calf care. I think the more a person cares about the calves the more perceptive they will be. Calf care has to be more than just another disliked chore. Caring this much does have a down side, however. Even after raising well over four thousand calves at Noblehurst I still hurt when a calf dies.

PREDISPOSED to make the right choices

It has been said that we all view the world through mental spectacles. This mental outlook or point of view colors all that we sense and what we do with it. How good will my choices for care be if I start with the mental outlook that calves are stupid, vicious little beasts inflicted on me by someone in control as a way to make my life miserable? This point of view is often reflected in abusive behavior toward calves (both verbal and physical) as well as in nearly deliberate neglect of their basic needs. In contrast, I have a number of calf raising friends that have quite the opposite mental outlook. Well, maybe they don't think calves have the mental potential for brain surgeons but they are sensitive to look for reasons why a calf behaves abnormally rather than just say, "she's stupid." Also, these friends have raised enough calves to know a broad range of choices in calf care. This means they know about choices in, for example, housing, bedding, nutrition, basic health care, and vaccination.

Experience is important in determining what we expect to see, hear, smell and touch. Experience in calf raising also helps us recognize what our senses tell us as something useful for calf care. It seems at least once a month year after year I pick up a new experience. Dr. Schneible, our vet, will guide my hand in feeling of some part of an injured or sick calf. "Feel of this lump right here," he will say. "That's where X happened." Now I know what to look for in the future. Recognizing the symptoms of various illness depends heavily on prior exposure with someone to explain what you are seeing (scours), hearing (raspy lungs), smelling (foot rot), and touching (navel infection).

Calf Raiser's Tip

Many of us end up with wet gloves in the wintertime. Now, if they are inexpensive cotton gloves we can just toss them on the heat or in a clothes dryer. But, what about more expensive ones, ones with linings? Hard to get dry. Pam recycles the cardboard tubes from holiday wrapping paper as glove dryers. Cut a 6 to 8 inch long section from the end. Stuff it up into the wet glove. Put the glove in a warm place such as over a warm air duct. the warm air goes up into glove to dry the inside while the outside gets dry, too.

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