

January 2020

Post-calving management– Dairy Focus Eoghan McAlonan

There is considerable variation across our farms when it comes to the first few hours and days after calving. Lots of questions are to be answered. Eoghan gives his opinion on these common questions.

When should we take the calf away?

I prefer the calf to be taken away as soon as possible, even snatched immediately after birth. The mother is a source of lots of bugs for the calf (Johne's disease, Cryptosporidium, respiratory bugs to name a few). The less time they spend with them, the better it is from a disease point of view. In fact, allowing the cow to develop a strong bond with the calf for a few days, as is still common, may make removal of the calf even more traumatic for the mother than removing before the bond has strengthened. We also commonly see traumatic injuries caused by the mother unfortunately standing or lying on the new-born who struggles to keep out of her way. The calf can also cause disease to the mum. Regular sucking, multiple times per day means teat end sphincters are open more, allowing mastitis bugs to invade. Calves are also unable to fully milk out a high yielding dairy cow which is a further mastitis risk.

When should the cow be milked first?

Again, as soon as possible, ideally within 4-6 hours. Remember we need to get colostrum into the calf by 6 hours at the latest. It is best to use a milking machine to ensure colostrum is harvested hygienically. Wash and dry udder if necessary, use pre-milking teat disinfection and fully milk out. Leaving some milk in the udder to reduce calcium loss is an older trick to avoid milk fever and is not supported anymore. Milk fever should be managed by successful dry cow nutrition. "Bovikalc" calcium boluses are useful for older cows at risk of milk fever. Portable milking machines work well if you need to milk the cow between milking times, or for cows which you don't want to walk to the parlour.

When should she join the herd?

Again, as soon as possible, after first milking. We should be doing everything possible to make the calving process as stress free as possible. That way she should be robust enough to enter the herd, fill up on lactation ration and have a rest.

Is a fresh group the answer?

A fresh group can be useful for those early weeks. Ensuring low stocking density and optimum feed access can help as well as helping us focus on the most vulnerable group of cows. Fresh groups can be milked first to help with mastitis and cell count management and enter the footbath first to aid in dermatitis control. However, the downside is that eventually we will then go through another group change. If you can maximise cow comfort and feed access without a fresh group then obviously that is preferable!



Look after yourself this January

January can be a difficult time both physically (it's cold!) and mentally. The short days and the end of the festive period can take make it a dark time of year, particularly for those who work outdoors. It is important to take time to look after yourself.

Junction 24 offers a free and confidential on-site service called the Derek Mead Health Room on every market day. You can walk in without an appointment and a nurse will be on-hand to carry out essential health checks such as blood pressure monitoring, and blood sugar testing, whilst also offering support for mental health issues. It is located just next to the auction ring.

It's important to talk. Look after yourself this January.



MilkSure✓

The next milksure course is on the 27th February at 2pm at Sedgemoor Auction Mart. This course is usually only required if you have recently failed a bulk tank antibiotic test or if it has been specifically requested by your milk buyer.

Medicines Course



The next medicine course is 12th February 2pm start at Sedgemoor auction centre.

This fulfils Red Tractor requirements for Beef, Sheep or Dairy

Book your place by calling any office.



Happy and prosperous New Year to all our clients and their families.



Your local farm veterinary service

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