

Newsletter September 2021

Calf Health Pointers

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There is a clear link between calf growth rates from birth to weaning and future milk production. For every 100g increase in growth rate there will be an increase of around 80 litres in the first lactation alone, if the calf stays disease free this figure can be greater, around 150 litres. From data generated on FVSW farms, we have seen that calves that have scour or pneumonia can be significantly lighter at weaning. To achieve this, there are a number of areas that we can look at:

Calving Environment

The cleaner the environment, the lower the challenge from bugs will be. A lying area of 1m² per 1000 litres of 305 day milk production is recommended. However, the less time the calf can spend in the straw yard, the better. Johne's positive cows should also spend the entire dry period away from Johne's free cows.

Colostrum Quality and Collection

Leaving the calf to suck from the cow is not a good way to ensure adequate colostrum intake by the calf. Hygienically collecting colostrum and storing it, either in the fridge or freezer, will help make getting colostrum in calves easier and more successful. If colostrum is stored then only do so from Johne's negative cows and only store first-milking colostrum. Cow's teats should be hygienically prepared and all equipment should be clean and disinfected beforehand. Filling a 2 litre plastic milk bottle with water and freezing it makes a handy ice-pack for putting in dump buckets to rapidly cool the colostrum. Colostrum quality can be checked simply and easily with a refractometer.

Colostrum Feeding

If a calf is bottle fed with colostrum then 2 litres may be adequate but we generally recommend tubing with around 4 litres of colostrum (to a maximum of 10% bodyweight). A further feed of colostrum can be given 6-8 hours later. Timing of this feed is critical, ASAP after birth, ideally, but definitely within 6 hours.

Feed and Water

All calves should have access to water. 4 litres of milk only provides calves with enough fluids for the first few days of life. The cleaner and fresher the water, the better – calves grow better the more often you clean your water buckets!

The feeding of dump milk is always to be discouraged, not only because of the risk of increasing antibiotic resistance, since milk fat and protein can vary quite a lot and so using a good quality milk powder can get rid of this variability.

Although the calf will not take significant amount of cake and forage in the early days of its life, both should be presented to the calf after the first few days of life. Cake should never be dusty and always check the list of feed ingredients to check that poor quality "filler" feeds are kept to a minimum.

Summary:

Ticking all the boxes of calf care will help reduce losses and maximise profits. Aim for the doubling of birth weight by weaning. Getting calves to excel at this stage will allow you to get her in to the milking herd at an earlier date which is better for her and better for your pocket. It all centres around Quality, Quantity, Cleanliness and Timing.

Colostrum Quality and Collection:

- 1) Collect colostrum from only Johne's Free cows.
- 2) Colostrum to be used for the first feed must be from the first milking and ASAP after calving
- 3) Ensure the teats are hygienically prepared and all equipment used is clean and disinfected
- 4) 2 litre bottles 3/4 full with ice can be put in the colostrum dump bucket to cool the colostrum unless it is to be fed immediately.
- 5) Colostrum should not be exposed to dust or dirt and should be cooled quickly prior to being frozen or chilled.
- 6) Use the refractometer to check colostrum quality



Monitoring Fluke in Sheep

Cormac White

A Wet summer means ideal conditions for snails which transmit fluke!

Sheep are *at highest risk of acute liver fluke infection from August to October*. At this time, sheep of any age can ingest liver fluke larvae (metacercariae) while grazing, which continue their lifecycle by migrating through the liver and damaging it as they do so. **The only effective treatment for acute liver fluke is triclabendazole.** Monitoring for infection and treating at the right time is essential, as inappropriate treatment regimes increase the risk of resistance developing. Furthermore if you administer treatment prior to infection then you have simply wasted your money.

Acute liver fluke can kill sheep whilst chronic infections initiated at this time of the year can have serious impacts on fertility and ewe/ram health.

How can you monitor for early fluke infection?

OPTION 1- BLOOD SAMPLE 6 LAMBS - replacements or otherwise running with the flock to check for antibody levels (Blood sampling adult ewes does not give an accurate indication of when they were infected as levels may still be raised from last year).

Why not do this at your TB Whole Herd test or at your next pre-movement test/Vet Visit?

OPTION 2- TAKE DUNG SAMPLES FROM 6 INDIVIDUAL EWES -

We then test this for fluke faecal antigen. An antigen is effectively a biological marker in the faeces, providing an indication that there is an immature fluke infection. Faecal antigen testing can pick up a fluke infection two to four weeks after ingestion of the larvae, much earlier than waiting until eggs can be found in the faeces. These can be dropped into any of our offices where we can send them off for sampling.



DON'T WASTE YOUR MONEY - TREAT FOR FLUKE AT THE RIGHT TIME BY MONITORING FOR INFECTION

Cell Count or Mastitis Worries?

Many of our client's are facing increased pressure to decrease bulk tank somatic cell count (BTSCC) and mastitis rates. We can help. Reducing cell count can be relatively straight forward... if you milk record. We can analyse those records and help you make good decisions as to which cows to cull, dry off or treat to decrease the BTSCC. Keeping the cell count at that lower level is a more difficult trick! We need to find out where the weak points on the farm are, which are allowing your cows to get infected and develop a raised cell count.

To that end we have begun to use the **AHDB quarter-pro** approach which helps us analyse your data to determine if the problem lies with the dry cows or lactating cows and if the risky period is during the milking process (contagious) or from the accommodation or grazing (environmental). We can then focus on these areas and make changes to decrease the risk from mastitis.

To make good decisions with regards to mastitis and somatic cell counts it is imperative to:

- Milk record (with nmr/cis/qmms)
- Record clinical cases i.e. actual cases of mastitis. These cases should be passed onto your milk recording company (FOC) so we can access everything remotely and use the AHDB quarter-pro tool to help you.

We have used this approach on several farms and made some great improvements on cell count and mastitis rates which will really please your milk buyer, especially if you are on an aligned supermarket contract.

