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Expert Tips for Raising Successful Calves – Post-Calving Care

• July 15, 2022

To follow up on the 8 tips for excellent calf care from dry-off to calving, here are 13 practices to keep in mind for post-calving calf care.

Colostrum management

Colostrum management should be the most important element to consider when evaluating a breeding program. The biggest challenge in raising calves is preventing and treating disease. Disease can be significantly minimized by a good colostrum management protocol.

During the first few weeks of life, the calf is completely dependent on the immunity it received from colostrum.

1- Time

Administer within the first 3 hours of life. The period of awakening of the first ones following the birth helps the voluntarism for the feeding.

2- Innocuousness

Have less than 100,000 cfu of total bacteria/ml and less than 10,000 cfu of total coliforms/ml.

3- Quality

Test at over 22% Brix

4- Quantity

Reaching at least 10% of the calf’s weight

5- Storage

Colostrum over 22% Brix can be frozen, carefully identify the date of

harvest, the cow’s identification, and the Brix level. Frozen colostrum can be stored for up to 6 months. If placed in the refrigerator, it can be kept for a maximum of 3 days.

6- Follow-up

Record the quantity, quality and timing of colostrum given to the calf and disease episodes (age of calf, type of disease, etc.)

Food and equipment

7- Cleaning and disinfecting

Ensure all equipment associated with calving, calf feeding, etc. is clean between uses.

8- Teats

Do not cut the opening to allow milk to flow more quickly as this can cause calves to inhale milk and can lead to pneumonia and other respiratory diseases.

9- Transition milk

Transitional milk is the milk that does not go into the reservoir after calving, but which is not the first milking, i.e., colostrum. Feed the transition milk for at least 3 days after birth.

10- Growth monitoring

Tracking weights is the proven method to evaluate the success of your breeding program. At weaning, you want to have at least doubled the birth weight, 55% of the mature cow weight at breeding

and at calving, 82-85% of the mature cow weight.

Housing

11- Bedding

Make sure there is an adequate amount of bedding. A nesting score of 3 is recommended (above the legs when the calf is lying down).

12- Ventilation

Calves need a well-ventilated, draft-free home. We aim for 4 air changes per hour in winter, 15 air changes in spring and fall and 40 air changes in summer.

13- Cold weather support

It can be beneficial to use heat lamps and coats as they are very useful during the winter months when the temperature drops.

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Quick Reference Card for Calves

Growth Chart by Breed