



The Chapmans spray everything in their three sheds with a virucide every week for the first three weeks of rearing.

Rearers develop 'rest day' in battle against scours

Observation is paramount to maintaining animal health in the Chapman's calf sheds. If a calf is slow to stand up and feed then they will take its temperature and keep an eye on it throughout the day.

If the calf develops an illness it is transferred to a hospital pen for treatment.

Losses amount to only 3% with most of those fatalities occurring in the first week, often indicative of a poor immune system or the result of navel infection contracted within the first few hours of a calf's life.

"If they have been compromised somewhere along the line you soon know all about it."

The wastage rate has risen 1% in the last year. Kevin says this is because they have become more pragmatic

about sick calves.

Barb in particular used to spend a lot of time and money nursing sick calves, only to find these calves were the tail enders, slow to grow and difficult to sell at the end of the season.

If they don't bounce back within three days their future looks grim.

To build a strong immune system the calves need colostrum in the first days of their lives and Kevin says they are completely reliant on what the dairy farmer does in the first six to 12 hours as to whether the calves get enough colostrum.

"That's why it is important to get guys who are willing to work with you."

Scours, both viral and nutritional, is the most common illness.

Barb says they had noticed a pattern with scours in that it seemed to occur five days after the calves arrived on their farm.

To prevent the scours developing at this stage Kevin and Barb have been giving the calves a "rest day" on the fifth day. On this day the calves are only fed electrolytes and this seems to work really well in reducing the incidence of scours.

Last year the Chapmans vaccinated against Pink Eye, a problem that had plagued the calves the year before.

Barb noticed a pattern occurring in calves five days after they arrived on the farm.

Although not a serious illness, viral Pink Eye proved to be of nuisance value in that it spread amongst the calves just prior to them leaving the property.

The calves had to be treated and kept on the farm until the condition had cleared, a costly exercise.

As well as a Pink Eye vaccine the calves are given a five-in-one vaccine and de-horned at six weeks of age.

So far the Chapmans have avoided any serious outbreaks of viral or bacterial illnesses such as Rotavirus, Salmonella or E.Coli, but this is more because of good management than good luck.

The three calf sheds are completely emptied between seasons, hosed out and treated with Terminator disinfectant.

Once the sheds are rebuilt and the post-shavings bedding laid down, everything in the shed is sprayed with a virucide every week for the first three weeks.

The bedding is not taken out of the shed during the season; rather clean bedding is laid on top of the soiled bedding.

The Chapman's three calf sheds are impressive. Although originally poultry sheds, the three different sized sheds are ideal for rearing calves.

They are warm, well-ventilated, with sloped flooring allowing good drainage.

The post-shavings bedding, bought locally, is perfect in that provides good drainage without going soggy.

Depending on which of the three sheds they are in the calves are run in mobs of either 12,13 or 15, allowing 1.5-2m²/calf.

The calves stay in their mobs and in the same pen for their four-week stay in the sheds.

With so many mouths to feed it seems surprising that until this season Kevin and Barb have been doing all the work themselves.

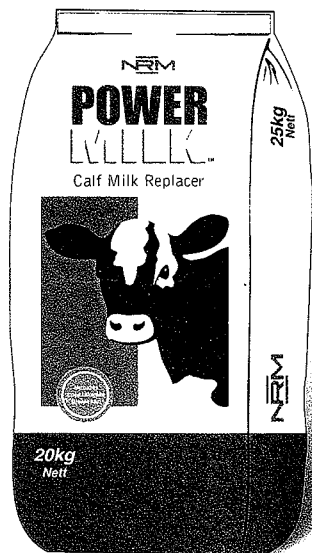
Kevin jokingly says they usually lose about 7kg over the calf-rearing season, which is not surprising.

This year they have employed a local lady to help them out and this extra hand gives the Chapmans the opportunity to increase the number of calves they raise.

Although the couple appear to have very good systems in place, Kevin says they are improving and streamlining their systems every year.

The need to increase the efficiency of their operation is driven by every increasing costs such as power, fuel and feed. Barb and Kevin work hard at keeping costs to a minimum while running a very large enterprise and running it very well.

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