



Calf Rearing Fact Sheet: Getting started

Guide to calf health

Key Points

1. Calves need warmth, high quality feed and fresh clean water at all times.
2. Monitor calves regularly.
3. Plenty of colostrum fed early is critical. At least 2 litres in first 12 hours and 4 litres total within first 24 hours. After that, you have missed the boat!
4. Scours are a calf rearer's nightmare. Take action quickly to ensure calves remain hydrated.
5. Take concerns to your veterinarian early. Saving money on vet bills may negatively impact both bottom line returns AND calf welfare.
6. Some practices—e.g. tube feeding, de-horning and castration require special skills—learn from other professionals.



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On Farm Research Calf Rearing Fact Sheet 1.5

Introduction

- Calf rearing requires a high degree of skill and stockmanship.
- Calves are new born animals - they are weak and vulnerable. Their digestive and immune systems are only partially developed.
- Calves need to be checked regularly so twice a day feeding (and twice a day checking) is a good idea for young calves. A calf that won't feed or is slow to come up to be fed has a problem.
- A good recording system helps detect problems early. Coloured neck bands are a good way of identifying calves with problems. For example, a calf that is a slow feeder can get a coloured band and be checked at the next feed. Have different coloured bands for different issues.
- Calves that are small, have had birthing difficulties or haven't had adequate colostrum are highly susceptible.
- Calves need at least 4 litres of colostrum in the first 24 hours. The first 12 hours are the most critical for ensuring maximum benefit from colostrum.
- The shed needs to be warm and dry with good ventilation and without draughts at calf level.
- A good layer of bedding is important to keep calves warm and absorb urine.

Scouring

- Scouring is the calf rearer's biggest nightmare. There are a number of causes and identification is often difficult. Young calves which are scouring need to be fed electrolytes immediately to avoid dehydration. The number and timing of calves scouring is often a clue as to the cause.
- Scouring in older calves is usually easier to deal with than scouring in young calves – the challenge is identifying the cause and deciding on treatment.

Navel infections

- These are caused by bacteria entering the umbilical cord. Navel becomes swollen, hot and the calf reacts when it is touched.
- Prevention is best - all calves should be treated with iodine at pick up. Infected navels need to be treated with penicillin.

Dehorning and castration

- Animal welfare is important and some practices are illegal. Learn appropriate techniques and timing.