

Vet's Corner:

Calf scours has been a problem for several producers this winter. There have been no new pathogens or special conditions: E. coli and Rota virus have been causing problems. The best treatment has been to avoid problems with proper colostrum management. At a recent conference, Dr. Vic Cortese, Pfizer Animal Health veterinarian gave several helpful insights.

Don't be afraid that colostrum will be overfed. Radiography shows that 5- 6 quarts can be tubed down a Holstein calf before the abomasum overfills and back flushes into the rumen. A Jersey calf can hold 3-4 quarts. If the stomach tube is inserted too deeply, colostrum can fill the rumen. So visualize how deeply the tube should be inserted before putting it down the calf.

In the past, some clients have complained that the calf will have loose manure if fed more than 3 quarts at birth as the Veterinarian suggests. Meconium, which is waste that collects in the rectum of the newborn, is evacuated because of the laxative effect of colostrum... This loosening of the manure is not harmful, and a sign that the calf got a good feeding. Another excuse to not feed enough colostrum is that the calf is not hungry at the next feeding. Normal colostrum contains sugars that will drive up the calf's blood glucose. This is a transient effect which depresses the calf's appetite for one feeding. In the long run, we know that a highly concentrated bolus of IgG in the first feeding will make a healthier calf that is more resistant to E. coli and Rota virus scours.

Another study was cited in which calves were fed 2 or 3 quarts of colostrum at birth and repeated before they were 10 hours old. 45% of the calves that received 2 quarts had failure of passive transfer. Only 5% of the calves that received 3 quarts had low plasma protein readings.

So for Holstein breeders, think about throwing out those old 2 quart bottles and purchasing new 3 quart bottles when the farm supply truck stops this month.

Feeding more colostrum, sooner after birth was the most important step in solving the calf scours problem for our producers.

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