

# Calf Link



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**Calf Rearing Newsletter No. 2**

**Monday 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2014**

## Have you Defrosted?

I don't think anyone missed out on their dose of snow/sleet/bone-chilling winds over the last week or so but fingers crossed that the season has turned for the better. This newsletter covers the topics of colostrum and cold calves. I'm sure many of you have heard of the importance of colostrum but it is still the one thing that if you get it right, the calf is on the front foot from day one. Cold calves need a lot of TLC if they are to make it through, so while I'm hoping we won't have any more weather like last week, we still need to know what to do to get those calves going again.

Remember, if you have specific questions you would like answered on any calf rearing topic, please email your name and contact details to Elspeth - [edunne@cluthavets.co.nz](mailto:edunne@cluthavets.co.nz) - and we will publish the answers in the next newsletter.



## HOT TIP

**Warming calves does not require fancy equipment, just a bit of patience and some common sense.**

It's not rocket science to work out warm calves do better. Warming calves is not difficult and can significantly improve survival rates. The following things all help to warm calves:

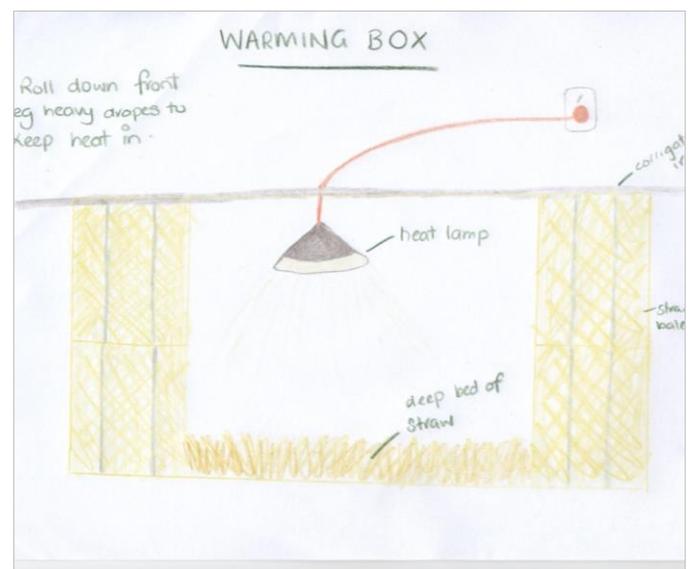
- Get calves into shed ASAP in colder weather.
- Feed warm colostrum as soon as you can. It provides warmth, energy and the ever important antibodies. Note - don't warm in the microwave – damages the proteins.
- Cover the calves – with either a calf cover or straw, something to keep the heat in.
- A simple set up of straw bedding and bales with a heat lamp can help revive calves.
- Dextrose into the abdomen can provide immediate energy to the calves (see below)

## Pleased not to be pulling this one out?

I was skying home over the weekend to get a dose of warmer weather, and mentioned to Dad that we were seeing some bigger calves around the place. In typical Aussie fashion, he said "Big? Those Kiwi's don't know what big is!" He promptly sent through a photo of the heifer calf below, which he had just assisted the cow to get out. At an estimated 70kg or so, the biggest struggle was getting the calf to the shed. It's no wonder it has inherited its mothers name of 'Temperance'.



PS For those interested, breeding is a Montbeliarde x Guernsey. Oh, and the cow is much happier after getting that one out!



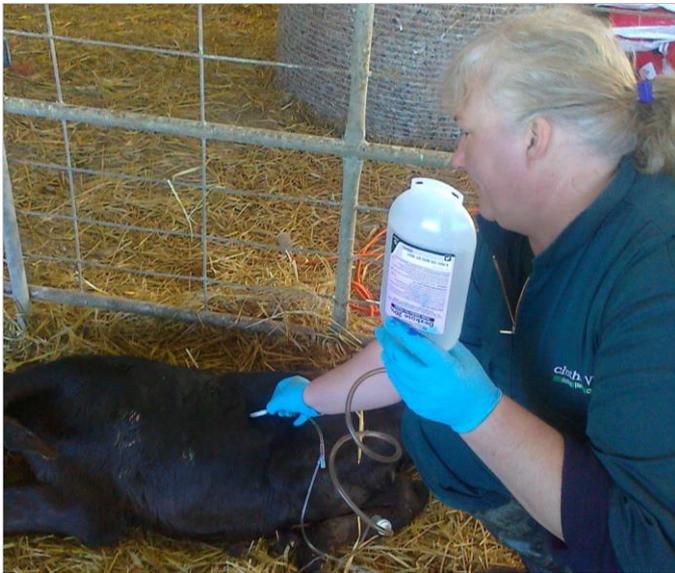
*A simple diagram of a warming box.*

# Extra Energy Boost for Cold Calves

Warming cold calves requires energy. The colder the calf, the more energy required. In some situations, the calves are so cold that the energy from giving colostrum is not enough to provide enough energy to the calf, forcing the calf to use the little fat it has stored. Metabolising fat to use as energy is a process that requires energy so, in essence, it's a vicious cycle.

## ***Intra-peritoneal 20% Dextrose***

20% dextrose can be injected into the abdominal cavity to provide the calf with a rapid source of energy. Just as intestines can absorb energy from the inside (where the food goes), they are also able to absorb simple molecules, like glucose from the outside of the intestines (the abdominal cavity).



In cold calves this technique enables the calves to have a quick energy boost that requires minimal metabolism for their little bodies to do. It is relatively simple to do and step by step instructions are available from the clinic, and can be collected when you collect the equipment needed for this procedure. It is not a difficult procedure, very similar to giving bags to milk fever cows.

Giving dextrose into the abdomen is not only a recovery technique for cold calves but also for sick calves as well. Sick calves, as well as often being dehydrated, will be low in energy and need a bit of a boost as well.



# Fast Facts: Colostrum

## **What is Colostrum?**

Colostrum is superfood. High in energy, protein, minerals, vitamins and antibodies, it provides the calf with everything it needs to survive the first day or so of life

## **Good colostrum is not necessarily yellow!**

The yellow colouring comes from the vitamin B-Carotene, which is naturally higher in some breeds than others. It doesn't give us an indication of how much antibody is in the colostrum. That is best done with a colostrometer.

## **The best years are the middle years.**

Cows in their prime years of life (ie 3-5years) typically provide the best colostrum. Avoid cows that are too young (heifers), induction cows, cows dripping milk pre-calving (low quality), and those diseased (mastitis, etc).

## **Golden Rule of 10%**

Ideally calves should receive 10% of their body weight in colostrum in the first 12 hours. The practicalities of this will vary between farms, but all calves should receive 2L of colostrum in their first 12 hours. Don't rely on the calves getting colostrum from mum – only 40% of calves get enough without intervention.

## **Storing Colostrum**

Never waste colostrum! Excess first milk colostrum can be frozen and defrosted in a hot water bath for those times when good quality colostrum is not available (early calves, late calves, etc)

First day colostrum should be kept separate and fed to first day calves, or older calves if excess is available. Day 2-4 colostrum can be mixed and stored through fermentation with products like colostrum-keeper, easi-yo or similar products. Keep these fermentation containers out of sunlight and below 20°C for best storage. Will keep for about 12 weeks. Don't put mastitis or treated milk in fermented colostrum – you will kill off the bacteria!