

Calf Link



CLUTHA VETS
Animal Health Centre

Balclutha
03 418 1280

Milton
03 417 8032

Calf Rearing Newsletter No. 3

Monday 1st September, 2014

Into the thick of it!

Having heard that one farm is down to less than 100 cows to go, I can only assume the calf sheds are filling quickly. I hope all is going well for everyone, with the calves growing rapidly, and the sick pen staying empty. I have been approached recently by people having a few sick calves, so in this newsletter we will look at what treatments are available for sick and scouring calves, and when is most appropriate to use them.

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 - and we will publish the answers in the next newsletter.

Sick Calves



We have all had to deal with sick calves at some point and we know it can be confusing, frustrating and disheartening at times. For most cases the key things are recognising sick calves early, giving the calves the treatment they need and preventing the spread of the disease to other calves. The following page outlines the different aspects we need to think about when dealing with calf diseases.

METACAM:

Pain relief for calves



Metacam is a long acting anti-inflammatory drug that can really help boost up sick calves. We have encouraged people to use this in calves that have navel infections or injuries, pneumonia, scouring or any other infection. We have noticed a few potential problems popping up regarding its dose rate and frequency.

Dose Rate: 1ml/calf

This is a drug where more is definitely not better. More can cause irreversible damage to the kidneys and liver. Just as it is for children, there are only a few anti-inflammatory drugs registered for use due to their potency. Please don't overdose your calves!

Frequency: Once

One dose of Metacam lasts for a good three days. It is not a daily injection as we do with antibiotics. Repeat doses are not needed in most cases. If the calf is still sick after three days, a quick call to the vet can give guidance as to treatment from then onwards.

Site: Under skin on neck

Metacam **must** be given **under the skin** of the animal, preferably on the neck. It uses the fat of the skin to slowly release into the bloodstream. If given into the muscle, you can cause big abscesses due to the chemical properties of the drug.

The first thing you need to think about with sick calves is not dealing with the one that is sick but the currently healthy calves that are also in the same pen or shed.

- Feed the other calves and do your routine work first.
- Isolate the sick calf – remove from pen and into the sick pen. Ideally, you would have two sick pens, one for scouring calves and one for calves sick with other diseases.
- Disinfect the area – if scouring, remove as much of the scours and spray the area with disinfectant.
- Disinfect yourself – when handling sick calves wear gloves, have separate overalls or waterproofs, scrub yourself down with disinfectant, and have a footbath on entry and exit of pen.

2) Examine the Calf

Some problems are very obvious, and others are a little more subtle. All sick calves should have the following done:

- How bright/sick is the calf – is it willing to feed, is it collapsed on the ground
- Take the temperature – normal is between 38.5-39.5°C.
- Is the calf dehydrated – pinch the skin over the ribs and see how quickly it falls back, if it is slow, the calf is dehydrated. Other signs include dry noses and sunken eyes.
- What noticeable signs of disease are present - scouring, coughing, snotty nose, weepy eyes etc.

3) Treatment Options - Scours

Treatment of sick calves will vary from farm to farm, and from what disease the calf has, but the treatment principles for each disease they require will be the same.

Fluids

Scouring calves very rarely die from the bug that they are infected by but from dehydration. A scouring calf loses a lot of fluids and these calves need to be replaced with small amounts and frequently. The basics we need to remember with rehydrating calves are:

- Calves should be offered milk at every feed and must not go more than 24hrs off milk - tube feed milk if necessary.

- There should be about 2hrs between feeding milk and feeding electrolytes. If fed together the electrolytes bind with milk compounds and prevent the milk from clotting.
- The only electrolyte that can be mixed with milk is diarrest (starch based electrolyte).
- Ensure ad lib access to clean drinking water at all times.
- Don't put recovered scouring calves back into their old pens as the calves may still be shedding the bugs – they can re-join the calves once outside as sunlight is a great disinfectant.

Severely dehydrated calves can appear to be in a coma and this is from the blood becoming too acidic. These calves are in a dire situation and most likely require IV fluids to rehydrate them, as well as oral fluids and supportive care.

Antibiotics

Antibiotics are not routinely needed for calves with scours. It is common to find nutritional scours in calves, often in the bossy and fast drinking calves. Nutritional scours do not require antibiotics and often respond well to just electrolytes for the dehydration. Calves with high or low temperatures often have either a primary or secondary infection with bacteria. Calves that have blood in the scours also are at risk of bacteria entering the bloodstream. These calves will benefit from antibiotics, an amphotrim product such as scourban or amphotrim bolus. Bovipen does not work for scouring calves.

Nursing Care

Just like when you are sick, a little bit of TLC can go a long way into making calves feel better.

- Keep the calves in a warm, dry and draught free pen
- Use a calf cover to help the calves reduce the amount of energy they need to stay warm

Also remember to record all treatments of sick calves, and this can include observations if more than 1 person is looking after the calves. Also remember the drug withholding periods.

DO NOT USE ANTIBIOTICS OR ANTI-INFLAMMATORY DRUGS ON BOBBY CALVES