

Calf-Link



Issue 1 2016



Welcome

Welcome to the first Calf-Link newsletter for the season. Calf-Link is a newsletter for anyone who is involved or interested in calf rearing. It will be sent out via email over the next few months to help you think about what the calves need, husbandry practices to keep on top of, as well as providing a way to keep you informed about any problems we see popping up around the district. If you know of someone who might be interested in receiving this newsletter please let the clinic know and we will ensure that they receive them. You can email smcnutt@cluthavets.co.nz or call 03 418 1280. And if you have questions about specific cases or topics, please email Elspeth (edunne@cluthavets.co.nz).

Scour Vaccines

Using one of the several scour vaccines (eg Rotavec/Scourguard/Rotagal), as a way to help minimise the risk of a scours outbreak relies not just on injecting the cow with the right technique at the right time, but also good colostrum feeding practices (see next page). These vaccines are a great management tool, but there are some very important things to remember to get the full benefit from them:

- All calves should be fed first day colostrum when they get to the calf shed, regardless of whether it looks like they have already fed off their mother or not. This is especially important if you have chosen to vaccinate only a selection of cows (not recommended practice).
- The sooner after birth the colostrum is fed to the calves, the more antibodies the calf is able to absorb. There is no cross-over of antibodies to the calf while it is still in the uterus - only through colostrum feeding.
- Vaccinating stock does not cover poor hygiene practices in the calf shed. You must still operate with the same degree of care - wearing gloves, foot baths, disinfecting pens and equipment regularly etc.
- If you haven't vaccinated your cows, preventative options are still available - both in the face of an outbreak, or to reduce risk if there has previously been scours. Please contact us to discuss the best options for you.

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- Scour Vaccines
- Iodine for Navels
- Warming up Cold Calves
- The Golden Rule of Colostrum
- Tube or Bottle?

Iodine for Navels

We have all come to realise the importance of spraying navels with iodine. Navels are a port for bacteria to enter the calves and cause not only navel infections but joint infections, liver abscesses and generalised ill-thrift.

The best product to use is a 10% spirit based one. This dries navels faster than weaker solutions in other bases (e.g. PVP) therefore decreasing the risk of bacterial infections becoming established.



Snow, Ice and Cold Calves

Given the weather over the past week and looking ahead, bringing in cold and wet calves might be happening for a little longer yet. Here are a few simple things you can do to help warm them up.



Feed Warm Colostrum

Normally when calves are brought in cold, they are recumbent, depressed and a bit “out of it” mentally. Calves need energy for the brain to function and often these calves are running out of reserves. Feeding good quality **warm** colostrum not only helps physically warm the calf, but provides the much needed energy for the calf to start shivering and warm itself. Feeding the calf should be the first thing that you do, before starting to warm it up. For severe cases use IP dextrose (below).

Cover the Calf

Dry the calf when you bring it inside. Even if you don't have bought calf covers then straw, old blankets or even old meal bags over the calf can help it retain some of its warmth. Protect it from drafts and make sure it is lying on a deep layer of dry bedding.



Active Warming

Some people have warming boxes, heat lamps or heat mats to help warm the calves. If you don't, then there are still some things you can do to warm calves. Hot water bottles, or even old plastic bottles filled with hot water can be placed alongside a calf under its cover and can help, particularly for those really dire calves. We tend not to wash the calves with warm water or wet them any further than they already are, as the drying process will actually lead to greater heat loss.

IP (Intra-peritoneal) Dextrose

The injection of dextrose (sugar) into the abdomen of a calf can be a quick way to provide it with energy. Please contact us to discuss the correct way of doing this.

Colostrum - Myth Busting

“The yellower the colostrum, the better it is”

FALSE!

So often we hear that good colostrum is the yellow stuff, and the less yellow, the worse it is. This is really not the case, and we have seen perfectly good colostrum discarded due to its colour.

The yellow colour comes from vitamin B-Carotene - the same stuff that makes pumpkins and carrots orange and occurs naturally higher in the colostrum of some breeds than others. The colour is not an accurate indication of the antibody level of the colostrum, which is much more important than its colour. Antibody level is far better measured using a colostrometer, which gives an indication of the density of the colostrum, which is a much better indication of quality.

The 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 at least receive 2L of colostrum as soon as practical. Don't rely on the calves getting colostrum from mum – studies show only 40% of calves get enough without intervention.

We say 12 hours because after this time, the calf's ability to absorb the antibodies declines, and is almost completely gone in 24 hours.

Tube or Bottle?

Every year we get asked the question - which is better, bottle feeding newborn calves or tube feeding? Ultimately as long as the calf gets enough good quality colostrum at the right time, it doesn't really matter how they get it. The aim is to get the colostrum into the abomasum and not the lungs.

Whichever you choose, just make sure that you have a system in place that will work for your setup, staffing and possibly your mental health/patience level as the season goes on.

We have a new model calf drencher available this season - the Antahi Trusti Tuber. Have a look next time you are in store, it may make your job much easier!

