

Producer Newsletter – Colostrum Management



First things first – what is colostrum and why is it so important? Colostrum is the first milk produced by a cow or heifer immediately after a calf is born. It contains immune cells, fat, vitamins, and minerals. The key ingredient however, is **ANTIBODIES** – antibodies are proteins that help protect your calf from pathogens and disease. Calves are born without any antibodies and need to get them from their dam via colostrum. Ensuring your calves get an adequate dose of antibodies through colostrum has huge effects on their survival, health, and growth.

We like to think of colostrum management in terms of the “5 Q’s”

1.) Quickly

- The gut of a calf can only absorb antibodies within the first 24 hours of life. Within 6 hours of birth, their ability to absorb antibodies starts to decrease.
- Thus, ensuring calves get their colostrum *QUICKLY* after they are born is key

2.) Quantity

- Depending on the quality of the colostrum, a beef calf should have 2.5 – 4 L of colostrum shortly after birth. It is always a good idea to have some colostrum replacer on hand in case you are unable to get adequate volumes from the dam.
- Making sure the calf gets an adequate *QUANTITY* of colostrum helps ensure sufficient antibody levels

3.) Quality

- The quality of colostrum is dependent on your cow or heifer - healthy mamma = healthy baby!
- Nutrition and vaccination status of your dams are key in ensuring good *QUALITY* colostrum.

4.) sQueaky Clean

- Bacterial contamination of colostrum increases the risk of disease in your calf and also can decrease the absorption of antibodies. Common causes of bacteria include a dirty udder, dirty colostrum (e.g. mastitis), or dirty equipment if you are tube- or bottle-feeding your colostrum
- Simple strategies such as ensuring a good disinfection protocol for your equipment can help you make sure your colostrum is *SQUEAKY CLEAN*.

5.) Quantify

- This is where your veterinary team comes in, particularly if you have historically had problems with calf health or in the face of a disease outbreak.
- Collecting blood from your calves helps us *QUANTIFY* their levels of antibodies and can help us determine whether your herd is having difficulty with colostrum management.

In summary, following this one simple rule will help ensure improvement in the antibody levels of your calves:

****If a calf does not suck on its own, it should get 1 – 2 L of good quality colostrum within 4 hours of birth. After this you should be watching closely for it to be sucking from the dam. If it is not sucking from the dam, it should get an additional 1 – 2 liters within 12 hours of birth****

Thank you for reading! Feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns,

Your team at the Edson Veterinary Clinic