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Six steps to reduce calf scours this season

Greensboro, NC, November 24, 2008 – Scours is a leading cause of death for newborn calves, and it can cause producers considerable financial loss. Now is the time to take preventive steps to avoid a costly scours outbreak.

Three practicing veterinarians share six steps to help prevent scours this season. They are: James Heth, DVM, of Mineral Point, Wis.; Justin Helgerson, DVM, of Postville, Iowa; and Michael Saathoff, DVM, of Miller, Neb.

STEP 1: Have a quality nutritional program in place.

Heth says nutritional deficiencies in cows can lead to calving difficulties, plus lower quantity and quality of colostrum. Cows should have a body condition score between 6 and 7 at calving.

“Pay close attention to rations the last couple of months before they calve to make sure they’re getting adequate selenium, vitamin E, copper and protein to generate high-quality colostrum,” says Heth.

STEP 2: Vaccinate for scours.

All three veterinarians agree that using a scours vaccine is essential to preventing scours. The vaccine is given to pregnant cows prior to calving to bolster the scours prevention antibodies in her colostrum.

Saathoff says he recommends using Scour Bos® 9 because it is a very broad-spectrum vaccine. “Scour Bos offers protection against rotavirus, coronavirus, *E. coli* and *C. perfringens* Type C,” he explains. “It is very complete. We’ve seen very good results with it.”

Heth also recommends Scour Bos to his clients. “Before Scour Bos, there were times when we were treating 20 to 25 calves per day in the spring,” he recalls. “Scours is no longer a problem since we switched to Scour Bos. We use it because it works consistently.”

STEP 3: Vaccinate at the right time.

Cows build antibodies in their blood before laying them down in colostrum, and antibodies move from blood to the colostrum four to six weeks before calving.

By giving the vaccine prior to that window, antibodies in a cow’s colostrum can be maximized. For beef producers, this timing often coincides with preg-check, which also is a convenient and cost-effective time to vaccinate.

Saathoff explains: "Many times, we will get only one or two chances to work beef cows each year – one of those times is when we preg-check the cows. We give Scour Bos at this time. The oil adjuvant allows the product to last a long time."

Heth adds: "Being able to vaccinate at preg-check simplifies life tremendously. Plus we don't have to worry about running cows through the chute so close to calving."

STEP 4: Offer a clean, dry calving environment.

Helgersen says it's important to calve in a clean, well-ventilated environment to limit exposure to diarrhea-causing organisms.

"You can do everything right, but if the calf is born in a cold, wet environment, then it is probably still going to break with scours," he says.

STEP 5: Provide calf with adequate colostrum at birth.

Delivering colostrum at birth is vitally important because calves are born with a naïve immune system. Colostrum provides essential nutrients and scours-fighting antibodies. As the calf grows older, it loses its ability to absorb colostral antibodies.

Calves should ingest at least four quarts of antibody-bolstered colostrum within six hours of birth.

STEP 6: Resist reducing prevention when times are tight.

Preventive measures are more cost effective than treatment ones.

"The cost of vaccination is minimal compared to treatment," says Helgersen. "If a producer treats scours, it likely will cost \$25-\$50 per calf. If they involve the veterinarian and require an IV, you're looking at \$75-\$150 per calf."

Plus, there's lost productivity over the long run. In a study published in the *American Journal of Veterinary Research*, calves that became sick in the first four weeks of life weighed 35 pounds less at weaning than their healthy herd mates. On a \$1/pound market, this means \$35 less per sick calf come sale day at weaning.

For more information about preventing calf scours, visit www.livestock.novartis.com or talk with your veterinarian.

Note:

Observe label withdrawal times. Caution: Do not use undiluted. Contraindications: Swine being treated with Denagard (tiamulin) should not have access to feeds containing polyether ionophores (e.g., lasalocid, monensin, narasin, salinomycin and semduramicin) as adverse reactions may occur. See product label for directions for use and additional information.

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