
Managing Calf Scours

The topic of discussion at a recent Monday Night meeting was ways to reduce the losses from calf scours. Diarrhea is one of the leading reasons we lose young calves. Some beef herds have experienced losses of 5-10% of the calves and significant veterinary and medicine expenses. Treating sick calves takes a financial and an emotional toll on beef operators.

Common infectious agents include bacteria like E-coli and Salmonella; viruses like rotavirus and coronavirus; and protozoa like cryptosporidia. calf scours caused by E-coli and Salmonella often hit within a day or two of calving and are associated with crowding and less than clean and dry lots and housing areas. Care to the animal environment and vaccination of the cows to improve antibodies in the colostrum are keys to good control.

Calf scours caused by viruses and protozoa are more often associated with scours occurring several weeks after calving. There is clear association with these viruses being shed by older calves and being passed to younger calves as the calving season progresses.

University of Nebraska Extension has had some remarkable success working with cattle producers and nearly eliminating this type of scours. Case herd #1 had 800 to 900 cows and had been losing over 10% of the calves in the three prior seasons. Veterinary and medicine bills were over \$3100 per year just during calving season. The rancher adopted the Sandhills Calving System and in the three calving seasons since, only 4 calves have been treated for scours and no calves have been lost to scours. The calving time, veterinary, and medicine bills have been less than \$130 per year. **REMARKABLE!**

What is the Sandhills Calving System and how does it work? Farmer Ranchers need to identify 7 to 8 calving areas or division of areas. Start the calving season in the third or fourth most ideal site. At the end of two weeks leave all the cows with calves in this pen (area) and move the remaining cows to pen (area) #2. Then each week move the cows that have not calved to a new pen (area) site. Your peak calving times in site #2, #3, and #4 should be your best sites as more calves are likely to be born in these sites. The system works because the viruses are shed and become part of the soil/manure/fouled feed disease bearing complex. If new calves are kept away from this contact the chance of breaking with roto, corona, or crypto are practically eliminated. It's like a calf hutch method managing calves and cows for the beef operator.

calving areas can just be subdivided lots or pens and the cattle could even share fenceline feeders and waterers without concern. It is the virus contaminated soil and feces that the cattle need to have isolation from. Does it take planning? YES! Does it take extra effort in feeding and caring for groups of cattle? YES! Is it worth it? That is going to depend on each operation situation and experience with scours and losses. Your veterinary can help you to make that decision.

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