

January 2025

Calf Survival and Colostrum

Whether dairy or beef bred calves, the single most important thing owners can do is to provide the calf with good quality colostrum. Not only does this give the calf the best start in life but provides it with immunity against a wide variety of diseases early in its life. A calf needs minimum 3 litres of **good quality** colostrum within the first 2 hours of life, or 4 litres of average quality colostrum. It will typically take a calf 20 minutes normal suckling to get enough colostrum. Treating the calf's navel with iodine in alcohol or Antibiotic (Blue) spray will reduce joint and navel ill. Consider giving the calf vitamin supplements e.g. Vitamin E soon after birth if the mineral status of the dry cows is questionable.

What makes good quality colostrum?

1. The sooner the cow is milked or suckled after calving the better. The quality of colostrum decreases with increased time after calving.
2. Older cows (but not very old!) have better quality colostrum than heifers as they've been exposed to more infections and their bodies have produced more immunity against them.
3. An absolute minimum 3 week dry period.
4. Different breeds have different quality colostrum e.g. Jerseys have higher levels of immunoglobulins than Holsteins.
5. A little milking before calving to reduce discomfort in the cow doesn't affect colostrums quality but intensive milking decreases immunoglobulin concentration a lot.
6. If the cows are vaccinated against rotavirus, coronavirus and K99 (eg Rotavec Corona) which are very common diseases in young calves; their colostrum will have specific immunoglobulins against these diseases which they pass onto the calf. A colostrometer is available at Parklands Veterinary Clinic to measure the quality of the colostrums, by simply dropping the device into the bucket of colostrum.

How do you know if the calf has adequate colostrum?

A blood test can be done between 1 and 3 days old (or older but accuracy diminishes), and the protein count analysed. This is very useful if you are getting preventable calf diseases.

Good colostrum management leads to happy, healthy calves and lambs - remembering these 5 Q's can keep you on track.

Scour is the leading cause of losses in suckler calves under three weeks of age, but the costs extend past the mortality figure, with growth weights heavily affected.

Prevention is always the best course of action. This requires a combination of maximising calf immunity, whilst minimising the amount of bugs they're exposed to in early life.

If you are noticing an issue in the herd, the first place to start is recording the number of cases and calf mortality. From here we can investigate potential causes and work to minimise future outbreaks. Call our vets for more info.



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TB and DAERA Advice on Reducing the Risk from Wildlife

TB rates are high at the moment and we are seeing this in our testing with reactors all too common. The DAERA website has some suggestions on reducing the risk of getting TB and the first page we will highlight is the risk from wildlife and suggestions for control.

Prevent badgers accessing cattle feed and water sources:

- Keep feed stores closed off and area under feed bins free of spilled meal.
- Avoid feeding meal on ground at pasture - use a raised trough.
- Consider using a "badger proof trough" with an anti-climbing roll bar on the side.
- If providing meal at grass via trough or creep feeder consider feeding in the morning so troughs are empty at night when badgers are out.
- Hang lick buckets on a pole or stand to keep them out of reach to badgers or use an alternative means of Magnesium supplementation. Lick buckets should be at least 1 meter off the ground, ideally 1.2 metres.
- Raise water troughs in fields as high as the type of stock allows. (minimum 1 metre off ground).
- Consider putting electric fencing reels across the face of silos at night.

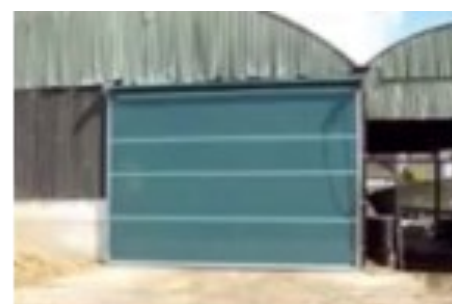
Keep cattle away from badger setts and latrines:

- Actively check your grazing ground for badger setts and latrines. Temporary electric fencing is very useful for this - the purpose of the fencing is to keep cattle away without disrupting badger movement.



Make your farmyard as inaccessible to badgers as possible:

- Consider closing off feed passages at night especially if concentrates are fed on top of silage.
- Consider if entry gates can be sheeted in or fitted with a rubber flap to prevent badgers getting underneath them or through them. (Gaps should not exceed 7.5cm in size).
- Silage bales placed tightly together in a row can make a good barrier to enclose open sides of yards.



Avoid grazing fields or using round feeders on ground known to be frequented by wild deer.

KEY POINTS:

- Due to their size and shape badgers can squeeze through very small gaps. (approx. 7.5 cm in diameter).
- Badger exclusion measures do not need to be custom built or expensive. Look for the gaps and block them - homemade barriers can work very well.