



### MANAGING THE FRESH CALVERS – CRUCIAL TO A GOOD SEASON

A cow well set up, in good general health and with a good appetite are the key outcomes before leaving the colostrum mob. It's no coincidence that most animal health issues occur in this period. Some of these problems are obvious (e.g. down cows) but a lot of production limiting disease may go unnoticed (i.e. subclinical).

The following are some useful management tips for the colostrum mob.

#### Minerals

This starts with appropriate magnesium supplementation to the springer mob pre-calving. For farms that have custom springer transition mixes, addition of high quality minerals (both macro and trace minerals) is essential.

Calcium levels are generally low in the first 24 – 36 hours after calving, with older cows (6+) remaining low for longer. Addition of lime flour in the colostrum will help to reduce milk fever risk. This can be dusted at 200-300 grams per cow daily on a fresh break. It can also be mixed in supplements, however, high levels of lime flour will not be palatable to cows and may result in reduced intakes of the supplement.

Magnesium is also crucial for colostrum. This may be dusted with the lime flour; mixed with supplement drenched or added to the water. The chosen method will depend on what is most effective and achievable with your farm setup.

#### Feed intake

Freshly calved cows will not have full appetite; they need to be offered plenty of food and higher grazing residuals will be needed. Use of low volume high quality supplements can help to maintain energy levels in these cows.

#### Once a day milking?

OAD milking of colostrum may have some cow health benefits in terms of improved energy balance and less metabolic. It may also be a practical option for managing workload on farm and less metabolic disease.

If dry cow therapy has been used it is important that cows are out of the vat for the full 8 milkings (not 4 days) if milking once daily.

#### Mastitis

Get the cows milked out as soon as possible after calving. Time between calving to first milking is a big factor linked to mastitis risk. Early milk out also allows you to harvest more high ("gold") quality colostrum for your calves. Colostrum deteriorates over time in the cow's udder and so early removal ensures maximum quality colostrum.

Be vigilant about checking for mastitis. Strip cows at their first milking and use the RMT paddle at the end of the colostrum period to screen cows before they enter with the milkers. If you have staff, then make this a farm policy. Ensuring only clean low SCC cows enter the milking mob will keep BTSCC low and is much easier than having to find a problem in the milkers.

#### finally.... Recording

Recording health issues in the spring is important. Records allow you to identify potential problems in your system, which can then be addressed. For example:- how many retained membranes did you have last season? Can you put a figure on it? If not, how do you know if it's a problem?





### DOWN COW

We all know that sinking feeling when one of the cows in the paddock does not get up, or we see one lay flat out instead of sitting up! Usually it is either raining or on the day when we already have too much to do!

**A down cow is an emergency for the cow.**

The first thing we need to do is decide why she is down

? Milk fever/grass staggers, nitrate poisoning, mastitis, calving, prolapse, broken leg, dislocated hip, other disease?

! If she is flat out, she needs to sit up or she will blow up and die

? Is she alert and able to hold her head up, or unconscious/non responsive?

Helpful video: <http://bit.ly/AssessingDownCow>



Does she need moving immediately?

? Is she near a ditch/river and could fall in, or is already in and may drown

? Is she stuck?

? Is she on concrete where she cannot get up easily etc?

Helpful video:

<http://bit.ly/MovingDownCow>

### Treatment

- If nitrate poisoning, call your vet immediately and check if other cows affected
- If milk fever/grass staggers, a bag of calcium/magnesium metabolic solution is a good place to start
- If calving, assess whether can remove the calf or need a vet visit
- If calving paralysis, immediate treatment with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory e.g. Metacam will increase chances of recovery
- If it is a prolapse, call the vet straight away, then putting clean warm towels around the prolapse and covering the cow whilst you wait will stop her losing more body heat
- In some situations immediate euthanasia may be the best treatment, please contact your Vet.





### Nursing

The most important thing following treatment that you can do for a down cow is nursing care.

If the treatment does not enable the cow to get up straight away, she has a big heavy body that is quickly damaged sitting on cold hard surfaces. Ideally if she cannot get up, she should be moved as quickly as possible to a barn with straw or shavings as bedding; if this is not possible, cover her where she is and this is help.

She needs food and water, if she is with other cows this means moving them or running an electric fence around her to stop the other cows pinching her supplies.

Nursing takes time, a constant supply of food and water, turning the cow from side to side at least four times daily to help prevent muscle damage, lifting the cow at least once daily to help restore normal circulation. If you do not have time to do this it may be kinder to the cow to euthanise her straight away. Your vet will be happy to chat with you to help you make these decisions.

Helpful Video: <http://bit.ly/NursingDownCow>

### RUMEN DEVELOPMENT: FILLING WITH VILLI

“Eh what?” I can hear you say! Well, let me explain - villi are the fingerlike structures inside our intestines that are responsible for the absorption of nutrients. Cows have them too, but the villi in the rumen are not present from birth and have to be nurtured in order to grow.

Stimulation of the inside of the rumen with meal and fibre feeding results in the growth of villi. The inside of the rumen starts as a smooth, flat surface. This surface is responsible for the absorption of nutrients from the diet.

To optimize growth we want to:

- maximize the nutrients that are absorbed from the feed through
- increase the available surface to absorb nutrients

*- This is where villi come in.*

As mentioned, they look like fingers and extend the surface of the rumen inwards to increase the total surface size.

Hay (fibre) provides mild stimulation, but meal is most important in achieving growth of the villi.

So yes, while meal may cost money up front, it will more than pay for itself in the long run. Meal not only increases the growth of the villi, allowing better absorption of nutrients (and hence better feed conversion post-weaning), but there is also a direct benefit pre-weaning as meal directly acts as an additional feed source alongside milk.

We recommend:

- Meal and hay from day 1
- Fresh water daily to help digestion and palatability

Remember: calves are the future of your herd with a lot of potential derived from genetic selection. If they do not have the tools (villi) to ruminate properly, they won't do anything properly.