

Calving Ease

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Quality Calf Care Depends on Quality Communication Among Calf Care Workers

- **Providing consistent care for young calves is a significant condition for successful calf management.**
- **The behaviors and health conditions of young calves are highly variable and can change very rapidly.**
- **Reliable person-to-person communication is essential for quality calf care.**

Consistency is key to quality care

Calves thrive on “same old, same old.” For example, calves do well when fed at the same times each day, being fed the same volume of same quality of milk at the same temperature each feeding. This can be done by hand-feeding calves or with a computer-controlled automatic feeder.

Equally essential is consistent observation of calves. Ideally, the same person sees the same calves several times daily. However, from one feeding to another or from day-to-day different calf care persons may get involved.

The behaviors and health conditions of young calves can change very rapidly.

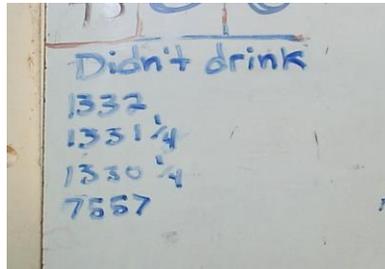
Symptoms that suggest all is not well with young milk-fed calves include readiness to stand up, enthusiasm in drinking their milk and their general posture (alert vs. droopy). It is common for calves to swing from very positive to very negative behavior over the space of six to twelve hours. When treated appropriately their recovery may be equally rapid.

The most significant factor in calf recovery is the early diagnosis that something is wrong and providing early treatment. Frequent observation of the same calf day after day provides the aware observer a “behavioral baseline.” When we see the “unusual” it clicks in our mind. This can create a “to do” event for the calf care person – “I need to check out #782 – she left ½ of her milk this feeding.”

Reliable person-to-person communication is essential for quality calf care.

If #782 only drank ½ her milk this afternoon she needs to be watched tomorrow morning. If it was just a onetime event, fine. If she does not finish her milk two feedings in a row I need to work with her to find out what is going wrong. HOWEVER, if I do only afternoon feeding and another person does morning feedings is #782’s abnormal behavior being passed between us?

All three of the pictures below show efforts to get key information from one caregiver to another. On the left, the afternoon feeder observed slow drinking and placed a yellow “warning” tag on the hutch. The morning feeder will know to give extra attention to this calf’s drinking speed and amount consumed.



The list on the dry-erase board in the center picture tells the afternoon feeder about problem drinkers – providing more information than just a yellow clip. In the picture at the right, note two white clips. This calf has not finished her milk for two feedings in a row – extra care is needed.

Not quite as time sensitive as calf health is getting consistent milk feeding. Increasing and decreasing the volume of milk fed should be easily communicated among everyone caring for the calves. These dairies



chose to use bucket lids and an eartag marking pen to make signs. Note that these signs have to endure many weather challenges and still be readable. Brrr! See the icicles on the blue sign! The clips make it easy to move the sign from pen to pen.

The picture at the left shows how one dairy used inexpensive plastic poultry leg bands (red) to tell the feeder how many scoops of calf starter grain to feed daily (two bands). Thus, tracking starter intake on this dairy told the calf care persons when to start weaning the calves. The picture on the right shows how clip-on clothes pins painted in bright neon colors are used to flag calves that are on once a day milk.



Thanks to Attica Veterinary Associates, P.C. for supporting this issue. More information on the calf management newsletter is [HERE](http://atticacows.com/resources/newsletter-calf-management.php) or at this URL <http://atticacows.com/resources/newsletter-calf-management.php>