

CALVING EASE

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How Good is My Calf Rearing Program?

Have you heard of the “Gold Standards” for heifer raising? “The standards outline production and performance expectations in six categories for Holstein calves from birth to six months of age and for Holstein heifers from 6 months to freshening. Additional goals for other dairy breeds will be added in the future.”

“The standards were developed by a team of producers, contract growers, consultants and industry representatives who surveyed producers, DCHA members and university specialists across the United States. Support for this project was generously provided by Pfizer Animal Health” They were revised and republished in 2016.

These standards are published at www.calfandheifer.org. As of January 2017 this section is available to Dairy Calf and Heifer Association members only.

What are the standards for younger heifers?

Target mortality rates are:

1. 24 hours to 60 days of age: <3%
2. 61-180 days of age: <2%

Target morbidity rates:

Scours:

1. Preweaning: <15%
2. Postweaning to 120 days of age: <2%
3. 121-180 days of age: <1%

Pneumonia:

1. Preweaning: <10%
2. Postweaning to 120 days of age: 10%
3. 121-180 days of age: <2%

Target growth rates are:

1. 24 hours to 60 days of age: double birth rate

2. Weaning to first breeding: 1.8 lbs/day

Additional sections describe standards for (1) Colostrum management, (2) Nutrition, and (3) Housing.

What are the standards for older heifers?

Target mortality rates:

1. 6 to 12 months of age: <1%
2. 12 months to freshening: <0.5%

Target morbidity rates:

Pneumonia:

1. 6 to 12 months of age: <3%
2. 12 months to freshening: <1%

All other causes:

1. 6 to 12 months of age: <4%
2. 12 months to freshening: <2%

Housing, vaccination and parasite control and breeding complete the list of standards.

Are these the best standards for my operation?

At the end of every year one worthwhile task would be to summarize performance on your calf and heifer operation. Use the targets criteria from the standards – like mortality, morbidity, growth, colostrum management, calf nutrition, calf housing, heifer housing, vaccination and parasite control and breeding. Where do you stand?

Then, you have a choice of comparing yourself to (1) where you were last year on these same targets, or (2) the “Gold Standards”. Usually there are at least two or three areas that represent opportunities to make our heifer raising enterprise more profitable. Should those become our 2011 goals?

Good calf and heifer raising for 2011!

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