

MEDICINE AND MANAGEMENT

By CARL TROOP, VMD



Notes on freshening time

AUTHORS NOTE: Veterinarians are in the unique position of usually being called upon only when there are problems, or, more hopefully, to prevent problems. We see what is going wrong more often than what is happening right, the mistakes more often than the proper decisions, and the conditions, environment, and management that contribute to them. It is the hope of this column to be able to use this position as a veterinarian, along with being able to understand the farmer and what is practical for him; to incorporate the two into a helpful, meaningful, practical guide for many of today's modern problems, along with seasonal hints and suggestions. It is in no way intended to be a substitute for proper veterinary service and consultation with your own veterinarian for your own particular problems; but rather to encourage ways which farmer and veterinarian can work more efficiently together to insure optimum use of the many services which your veterinarian can provide.

It is only fitting to begin this series with the most important day on the dairy farm, D-day or delivery day. It must be realized that this day is important for two animals, the cow and her calf, and any decisions made must be made in the light of the effect it will have on both. There have been hundreds of columns written on this subject, but some of the things which can be done on this particular day are so important they cannot be stressed too much. And these few things are the ones which, if neglected, will cause the greatest losses.

The maternity pen is one of the most important areas on the farm, but unfortunately, usually the most neglected. It is the place where every replacement gets its start and every cow begins what is hoped to be a profitable lactation. There are many things which can be done to positively influence both.

The size of the pen itself is very important. It should be at least 15 ft. by 15 ft. or a minimum of 225 square feet, preferably larger if possible. Many of the problems arise in pens so small that regardless of where the cow lays down her front end is against one side making it difficult to rise, or her back end is against the other side making it difficult to calve or to assist in calving should that be necessary.

The floor of the pen can be dirt or concrete, but if concrete it should always have at least an eight inch firm manure pack. Cows and concrete do not get along well together, especially cows which are already under stress and at a time when locomotion may become difficult for a variety of reasons. There are many fresh cows lost because they did not have good footing when they needed it. Dirt and firm manure packs provide it. Concrete, even concrete covered with straw does not.

The pen should be well bedded, well ventilated, well lighted, dry, and free from drafts. Each of these is very important, easy to provide in a properly constructed pen, and should never be even slightly compromised, but all too often are partially or completely neglected. Poorly ventilated or drafty pens and respiratory problems are constant companions. This is a period of stress for cow and calf, and everything we can do to lessen the stress will increase the chances for success.

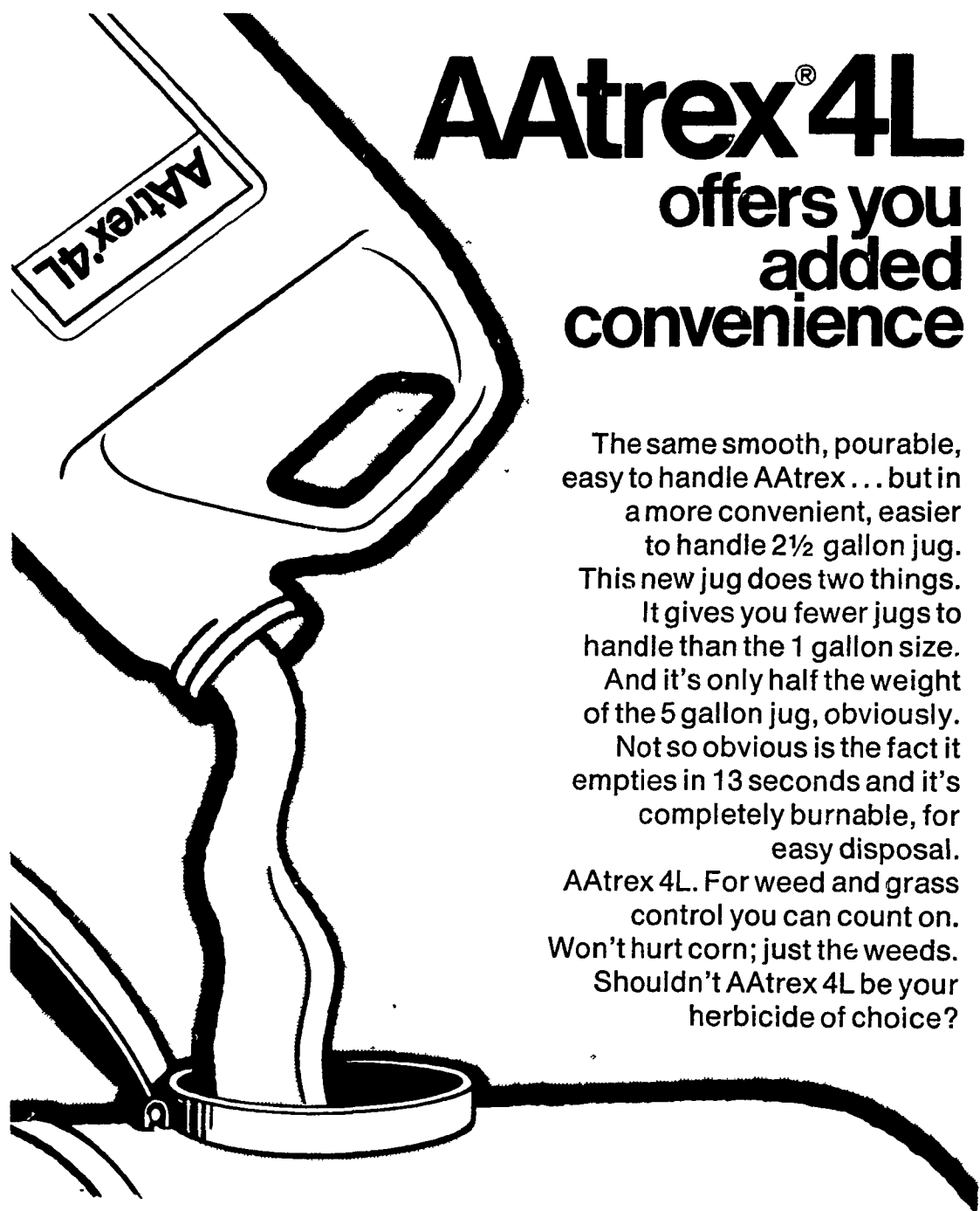
The most important economic loss with fresh cows is not milk fever but mastitis. Most farmers are alert for and recognize early signs of milk fever, and it is relatively easy to treat. It is amazing, though, how few cows are checked for mastitis when they calve. Depending on the type and severity of the mastitis, a matter of just a few hours can mean the difference between an infection that is still treatable and one that is beyond control. Several times a month I am called to check a fresh cow off feed where mastitis is the only problem and the farmer does not know it exists. So check those fresh cows for mastitis. Check them as they are springing if any unusual hardness or uneven swelling exists. If mastitis is a problem, the

quarter should be stripped out and treated, even if it means increasing the chances for milk fever. Milk fever can be treated. Many advanced mastitis cases can not.

Now for the calf. Again it has been written many times of the importance of getting that colostrum into the calf as soon after calving as possible. And again this one practice is so important it cannot be stressed too much. The calf

should receive colostrum within 30 minutes after birth if possible, as any delay is going to decrease the effective immunity it gets from the colostrum, and increase its susceptibility to many diseases. The navel should also be dipped with iodine as soon after birth as possible. The condition of the maternity pen is as important for the calf as it is for the cow. If you are willing to compromise these conditions, and the few moments it takes to properly care for cow and calf, then you should be prepared to compromise the quality of the products that come out of these pens. If you want cows and calves with a head start on the stresses in the days ahead, it is going to take a little time and effort, but it will be time and effort which cannot be matched for returns by any other endeavor on the farm.

One final point. As stated before, the maternity area is the most important area on the farm, but all too often the most neglected. If yours is inadequate, the next time you are considering remodeling your barn, adding to or building on, or just trying to figure out what financial investment might give the best return, think of the maternity area. A new tractor or disc can wait if you could build or remodel to provide your cows with a more ideal environment in which to calve, one designed to be well lighted, easy to keep dry, well ventilated, and free from drafts. It would generate returns for years to come. Believe one who has seen and worked with all the problems. It is something worthy of your consideration, for it is the foundation from which your livelihood is built.



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