

Calf losses in Pa. subject of dairy seminar

LANCASTER — Calf losses in Pennsylvania cost dairymen close to \$5,000,000 annually but losses could be cut drastically by a change in attitude and management practices. This was the thrust of a dairy feeding and health seminar conducted Monday by the Cooperative Extension Services of Lancaster and York Counties at the Quality Inn in Lancaster. The program was designed for veterinarians and feed and equipment personnel.

Richard S. Adams, professor of dairy science extension at The Pennsylvania State University, feels that the raising of young stock has taken a back seat as people have been trying hard to increase herds and production. Adams emphasized that many problems of young stock come from problems in their management systems.

Lester C. Griel, Jr., DVM and associate professor of veterinary science at Penn State, agreed. He said, "The number one problem in raising dairy herd replacements is neo-natal diarrhea, or calf scours." No herd is immune from this serious problem and control is difficult because the infectious agents which cause the disease are so many. He added, "Through correct management practices dairymen can control the disease situation on their farms by minimizing exposure to infectious agents."

Calving area management should be of primary concern to dairymen, Griel said. "Most people don't program into new construction facilities for calving. A calf should be born in a clean area." He said he does not necessarily mean a calf must be born in a box stall, because some barns get a very heavy build-up of

organisms which can be difficult to clean completely. "A paddock of several acres back of the barn can be a clean area, if it is not used regularly for something else."

Following birth general sanitation of the calf must be followed, Griel noted. Preventing chilling of the animal is important, as is where you put the calf. The dipping of navels, Griel said, is one more management technique which has been preached for years and years. "All these management practices are an attitude instilled in the person raising the calf."

Good colostrum tains antibodies which will protect the calf from all diseases to which the mother has been exposed. "In order to have good colostrum intake, a calf should take four per cent of its body weight within the first six hours of life."

Pneumonia in calves is a management is another factor which could help ensure the low incidence of scours. Griel said, "Colostrum is a good cheap food - there's nothing better. It is high in energy, high in protein and high in vitamins." Furthermore, Griel said, colostrum can be a big problem for dairymen, Griel said, "Management which predisposes calves to pneumonia is the basic problem, faulty ventilation is often at fault. If we can clean up the environment, we can bring down the incidence of pneumonia, he said."

Another speaker, L.D. Muller, associate professor of dairy science at Penn State, reinforced the importance of feeding colostrum to calves. He said his personal equation for healthy cows is this: Healthy

cows + clean calving colostrum = an excellent chance for survival. Muller said, "Fermented colostrum is free and nutritionally good, and 25-30 per cent of the dairymen are now feeding it." It is beneficial because with fermented colostrum studies have shown a high growth rate, the reduced growth rate, the reduced incidence of scours, and reduced cost to dairymen.

Muller said the first colostrum should be fed directly to the calf, and all other colostrum from the first six milkings should be saved and mixed for fermenting. A plastic garbage can is an adequate container, and fermented colostrum can be held up to at least three weeks prior to feeding during cool weather. In warmer weather, a preservative may have to be added to keep the product palatable. If the colostrum supply is inadequate, animals can be switched to milk replacer, but he cautioned that too much switching can be injurious.

Muller also reported on recent studies which show that mastitic milk can be fed to calves successfully and safely. In fact, he said, there is probably more waste milk available than colostrum. It has been shown that there are fewer scours with fermented mastitic milk than with whole milk. He added that it is possible to feed treated mastitic milk, but cautioned that there is difficulty in getting it to ferment.

Once a day feeding of calves versus twice a day feeding of calves will produce about the same weight gain, Muller said. The danger of once a day feeding is that a farmer will not check animals often enough, and once a day is not enough.

Muller talked briefly about the advantages of early weaning, stating that it will stimulate rumen development, reduce costs and labor and cause less digestive upset. He said that a good calf starter must meet the

calf's nutritional needs and must be palatable.

Housing plays an important role in raising calves, and Muller said there are two ways to plan housing - warm or cold. The goal of adequate housing should be to establish a good growth rate, achieve healthy calves and minimize losses. The recommended temperature range for calves is 50 to 60 degrees F., although he noted that with calf hutches

becoming so popular it is evident that a lower range can be suitable.

An environmental control system must be designed to remove excess moisture from the air, maintain the temperature, provide a healthy environment and be economical in operation. A good system, Muller said must contain ventilation, heating, insulation, controls, and management, including the proper setting of the controls.

Richard S. Adams, professor of dairy science Extension at Penn State said there are two extreme conditions of management which can be found anywhere in the state. He said there are undersized animals going into production which don't receive enough feed after they begin production. More prevalent in this area, he said, are overfed young

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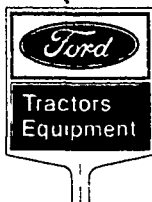
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