

Once-a-day calf feeding works in Leb. Co.

By GREGORY SOLT
Former Leb. Co.
Extension Agent

LEBANON — There was a time when all calves were allowed to nurse their dams or were fed whole milk three or four times a day. Many farmers, maybe your fathers or grandfathers, had a hard time believing their calves could survive being fed just twice a day. Today, that is standard procedure on most dairy farms. When milk replacer first appeared, few thought it could replace nature's best but it has done so on many farms.

More recently, fermented colostrum has become common as a calf feed. However, there still are farmers who can't believe the calves really like that "smelly stuff."

Whether a new feed or feeding system for calves is easily believable is not important. Rather, the important thing is that it works and saves time, energy, or money. Then it will be adopted.

Many attempts have been made over the past few years to change the traditional twice-a-day feeding of calves to a labor saving once-a-day feeding program. When whole milk or milk replacers were used, these attempts failed because the diluted nature of the products didn't allow the calf to consume enough nourishment in one meal, and the calves' systems were too easily "flooded" causing scouring. In recent years, the use of fermented colostrum to feed young dairy calves has increased markedly. Two properties of fermented colostrum allow it to be adapted to a once-a-day feeding program. Those properties are its concentrated nature (about 16 per cent solids versus 13 per cent for whole milk) and its anti-scouring factor which inhibits scouring even when the calf is maximum fed.

It's easy to see that labor can be cut in half when feeding calves once a day rather than twice a day. What may be hard to believe is that calves will grow as well and be as healthy being fed once a day as twice a day.

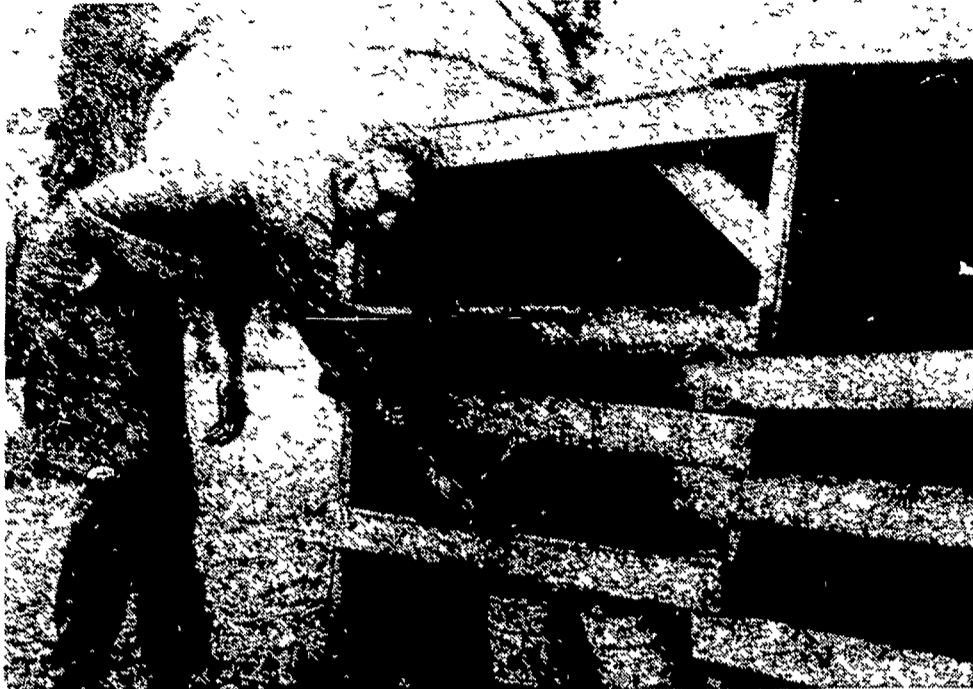
Studies at Penn State on about 150 calves showed once-a-day feeding to work on the university herd.

In February of 1977 two Lebanon County dairymen in cooperation with the Lebanon County Extension office began a field trial to see if once-a-day feeding of fermented colostrum would work on the farm.

The results are now tabulated. Feeding fermented colostrum once a day does work on the farm. It saves labor and money and produces excellent results.

For example, Victor Ziegler and family farm 500 acres south of Myerstown in Lebanon County. The Zieglers own 350 acres and milk over 500 Holstein cows feeding from five trench and two tower silos. They had been feeding fermented colostrum before starting the once-a-day program.

Says Ziegler, who has been on the program for nearly a



Victor Ziegler, dairyman from Lebanon County, feeds his calves fermented colostrum on a once-a-day schedule.

year, "Labor's the big thing. Every time you have to go through the motions twice, it costs money. Once a day saves you money."

He tries to calve in pasture when possible and move the calves to calf hutches in three or four hours. He feeds warm fresh colostrum twice a day for three days, then fermented colostrum once a day.

The Lebanon County dairyman keeps a complete feed and water in front of the calves from day one and weans at four to five weeks, or when the calves are ready.

The fermented colostrum is stored in plastic garbage pails next to the milk house and used when it's about a week old. Temperatures range from 35°F in Winter to 85°F in Summer. They feed two quarts of straight fermented colostrum on the average once a day, cutting back for smaller calves and giving a bigger measure to larger calves.

They found no difference in health and found no problems in getting a calf to drink. Ziegler says, "The calf knows no difference. It's harder to convince the man than it is the calf that the stuff is good."

Ziegler and his family feed fermented colostrum in the morning and grain and water in the evening. They believe in checking calves twice a day.

"We had some problems

this last busy season. We left the calf caretaker out on the tractor and lost some calves. Now, if it's the last thing we do, we walk up and down the calf hutches and get the calves' attention. If she raises her ears or looks at you, okay! If she doesn't, you better look at her. She has a fever or something's bothering her. You have to train yourself to look."

This dairyman has a tip for those with school age help. "With once-a-day, if kids are in school, let them always feed between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. so you can balance your labor and not have them rush in the morning."

Ziegler would recommend the program to anybody. "If a person's retired and wants to waste time, then you go to twice-a-day feeding for cheap entertainment. But, if you're in it for business, you can't beat the savings of once-a-day."

Finally, Victor says the overall word for the program is, "Simple, I like it cause it's so simple."

Enos Zimmerman and family farm about 220 acres on two farms north of Annville in Lebanon County. At present they're milking 85 Holsteins. They use calf hutches now but when they started feeding once-a-day all their calves were housed in a converted bank barn.

Zimmerman was not on a fermented colostrum program at all before

starting on the once-a-day program. "We wanted to get started on fermented colostrum — we heard a lot about it. And once-a-day was a big thing too. It could cut your time in half," he recalls.

Calves are born on the home farm and are transferred at three days of age to a second calf and heifer barn. The fermented colostrum is stored in plastic garbage pails in the calf barn and fed as needed at about six to 6.5 pounds per calf once a day. Zimmerman weans calves at five or six weeks or when ready. Storage problems put them back on milk replacer for a few months last Summer.

This Lebanon County dairyman likes the way his calves grow. "They go on feed sooner than if fed milk replacer twice a day, and they even seem to grow out a little better."

Zimmerman has a calf caretaker living at the calf farm who checks the animals several times a day.

Before going on fermented colostrum, Zimmerman raised only the heifers. Now both heifers and bull calves are raised out. He feels it's "one of the cheapest ways" to feed a calf.

Zimmerman also recommends once-a-day feeding to cut costs. As he puts it "it worked out swell."

Once a day feeding works.

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Although feeding the calves on a once-a-day basis works for Ziegler, he feels it is necessary to check the animals twice a day for fevers or other problems.

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