

Dairy Pipeline

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Dairy Replacements

Every herd needs replacements. The question is, should you buy your replacements or should you raise your own. Buying replacements has some advantages as well as some disadvantages.

You can probably buy replacements cheaper than you can raise them, unless you have a high-producing herd and are looking for heifers of equal or superior quality. They can be a source of superior genetic material for upgrading your herd if you know their breeding and if you choose them wisely. You can also purchase replacements that will calve when you have the greatest need for more milk.

Not raising heifers and buying replacements as you need them frees up more of your land and barn space for housing and feeding milking cows, which give a greater and quicker return on the dollar; money spent on calves and heifers gives no return until 1-2 years later.

However, when you buy replacements you increase the risk of exposing your herd to new diseases. If this does happen, it could erase all the benefits discussed above.

Some of these risks could be reduced if you can find someone to raise your heifers for you, preferably without them being mixed with cattle from other farms. You also have more opportunity to select which service sires are to be used.

Raising Growthy Heifers

If you do decide to raise your own heifers be determined to do a good job. Keep only those heifers of good breeding, the ones that have the best potential for continued improvement of the herd.

Be sure you have adequate housing and feeding space for them; otherwise, downsize your heifer herd to fit your facilities and do the best job with the few that you do raise.

A stunted heifer, grown in overcrowded, inadequate facilities can be very costly; you'll pay this cost the rest of her life in the form of reduced milk production and higher culling rates. It's a cost you may not see, but it is very real.

As you design, or evaluate, your heifer management program, set some goals for yourself. Examples are: Calf mortality less than 5 percent; heifer culling from weaning to freshening less than 5 percent; heifers ready to breed at 13-15 months at 750-800 pounds and ready to freshen at 22-24 months and weighing 1200 pounds; first service conception rate to A.I. bulls over 60 percent, first lactation milk projections nearly equal to herd average, etc. If some of these goals are too high for you, set goals that are more realistic and applicable to your situation.

Heifers should freshen with

good size, in good enough flesh, and with healthy appetites so they'll calve with ease, be ready to start a productive lactation and dry off in good enough flesh to be ready to start their second lactation with a running start. Unlike our heifers of yesteryear, today's productive heifers have to be well grown by the time they freshen; the nutrient demands for high levels of production are so great that very few nutrients are left over for growing out undersized heifers during the first lactation.

Healthy Calves

A healthy calf starts with a good dry cow program and a healthy dam.

To reduce infections at calving time — diarrhea and navel illness of the calf plus udder and uterine infection of the dam — provide the dam with a clean, dry sanitary, well-ventilated maternity area. A well-sodded pasture lot is still one of the best places. During inclement weather, indoor pens are

necessary. Not using pens during good weather allows them to be cleaned, sanitized and idled for long periods of time, thus helping to break up disease cycles.

Separate the calf from the dam as soon as it is born, even before it has a chance to nurse, and put it in an individual pen. This will help prevent the calf from ingesting manure, which is very important if you are trying to prevent the calf from acquiring Johne's disease. Also clip the navel and dip it in a disinfectant. The calf pen should be clean, dry, well bedded, draft free, well ventilated, and away from older animals. The aim is to protect the calf from inhaling germ-laden air and from having nose to nose contact with other cattle. Remember, fresh air is more important than warm air.

Give the calf about 3 quarts of colostrum milk, preferably within 30 minutes of birth, and a total of 6 quarts within 24 hours of birth. The aim is to have colostrum be the first thing that a calf ingests. This is very important since the

calf has no antibodies to fight off infection when it is born; it is almost solely dependent upon colostrum. The absorption rate of immunoglobulins from colostrum, through the intestine and into the bloodstream is very high during the first 30 minutes after birth; very little absorption occurs after 24 hours.

The quality of colostrum is also important, and will vary from cow to cow. Colostrum from heifers and from cows that have been milked before freshening often is of lower quality. For this reason, it is desirable to have a supply of frozen, good quality colostrum in reserve. The quality of colostrum can be measured easily by a colostrometer.

The most stressful time for a calf is about 3 days of age. The above practices will help calves get through this crucial period. You may also want to discuss with your veterinarian the need for special shots such as: selenium, vitamins, scours, respiratory, etc. Your veterinarian can also advise

you on a vaccination program for your herd.

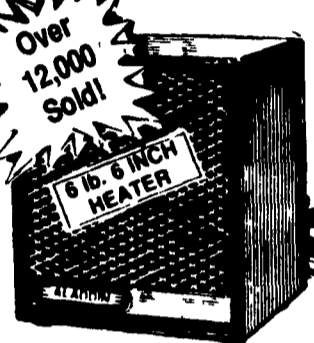
Scours can be infectious and nutritional. Infectious scours can be prevented by good sanitation and by immunization efforts, such as those discussed above. Keep nipples, buckets, and mangers clean, and keep feed and water fresh.

To prevent nutritional scours, limit milk intake to about 8-10 percent of body weight. If milk replacers are used, choose good quality replacers that are easily digested by calves; they generally contain more dairy products and fewer plant products.

Coccidiosis

Coccidiosis can also cause scours in calves, but the damage to calves starts about 3 weeks before you see the scours. By the time you see the scours or count the oocysts in the manure much damage has already been done. Prevention needs to start soon after birth; one method is to feed calf starters which contain a coccidio-

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