



Looking after colostrum cows

By Katrina Roberts, Anexa FVC Herd Health Veterinarian

By the time you read this you'll most likely have your first calves on the ground. If you are well prepared then all of the set up for calving has been done with average pasture cover, cow BCS, round length, supplements on hand, mineral supplements and herd vaccinations all ticked off. You may think that now you just sit back and wait to see what the weather throws at you. However, there is still one group of cows, which if managed well can have a profound effect on this season's performance.

I am sure you all have a "love / hate" relationship with the colostrum mob, but it is these cows that are the most important mob on the farm.

Some of the key management tips for this important mob of cows are;

✓ **Get the calf off the cow and the cow milked as soon as possible after calving.** There is research in many fields (including research from our own Cognosco group) that support this management strategy. The less time the cow has a calf on her and the quicker she is milked out fully, the less likely she is to get mastitis, the more likely she is to get eating, the less likely she will sit down with milk fever and the more milk she will produce. Also the calf is better off as the calf is less likely to get navel ill and more likely to get the right amount of good quality colostrum (if you have a tubing policy on your farm). The colostrum in the udder also deteriorates over time (both in the udder and in the bucket) so the fresher it's collected the better.

✓ **These cows must be offered ad libitum high quality feed.** After calving these animals do not have their full appetite and therefore if they are not offered food and plenty of it, they will not compete with the cows in the mob that calved 4-5 days ago. Colostrum cows will not graze to 1500-1600 and therefore accepting that this mob will have slightly higher residuals than the milking herd is what needs to occur. There is no point filling these cows up with poor quality silage, or hay either, as this will end up suppressing intakes further leading to further condition loss.

✓ **Ensuring the colostrum cows get the right amount of minerals supplemented in the right way is crucial.** Making assumptions about intakes of grass or PKE to get their minerals is not good enough. We know it is normal for calcium levels to be low for 24-36h after calving, but we want these cows to get out of this low level as quickly as possible. We also know that older cows (6+) stay lower for longer and are therefore at risk of becoming a down cow in the colostrum mob. Dusting a fresh break of grass with lime flour once a day at 200-300g/cow, and on some farms 200g dusted on fresh breaks twice a day is recommended. However, if your colostrum cows are getting access to supplements (maize or PKE) then lime flour should be mixed in with the supplements as well, at the appropriate rates. Lime flour is not very palatable so just adding lots of lime flour to the maize silage will most likely result in reduced intakes which is NOT what we want for this mob. These cows also need magnesium which can be dusted with the lime flour, drenched, mixed with the supplement or added to the water, the method of supplementation of mag will be farm specific, so speak to your vet about ways of tweaking it for this mob.



✓ **Be vigilant about checking for mastitis. Strip the freshly-calved cow at first milking onto a dark surface** (RMT paddle is useful for this) looking for any changes in the milk. You can use teat spray on cows in the colostrum mob both pre and post milking, as the milk is not being used for human consumption. Ensure you wait for the teat spray to dry before you cup the cow. Ideally, mastitis cows should not be run in with the colostrum cows but if there is a mastitis cow it should be milked after the colostrum cows to reduce the risk of cross infection. Ensure you milk out the colostrum cows fully as milk left in the udder is a mastitis risk. Handle the colostrum cows quietly as cows that are stressed will not let down their milk. If you have used a teat sealant at drying off or in the heifers, ensure you hand strip as much sealant out as possible. Once a cow leaves the colostrum mob it is often hard to find them, therefore they need to leave the colostrum mob clean and uninfected' otherwise they will be potentially infecting other cows. It is also easier to clear up an infection when the infection is recent and most infections that occur within 30 days of calving have been picked up during the dry period, therefore if you look hard enough you should find the clinical cases in the colostrum mob. Using the RMT paddle at the end of the colostrum period as a screening tool is a great way of making sure that ONLY clean low SCC cows enter the milking mob.



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Looking after colostrum cows continued...

- ✓ **It is possible that milking the colostrum cows OAD may have some positive benefits.** It will definitely reduce the workload on farm and therefore mean that other jobs are done better and with more care and attention, which will in turn lead to better outcomes. There is also some research to suggest it may reduce calcium demand and reduce negative energy balance, however there is still more to learn in this area. There are some potential negatives though as milking colostrum cows OAD does potentially increase the risk of IS grades as the dry cow therapy antibiotics have been testing with TAD milking to clear antibiotic from the udder and the risk of higher SCC if cows are not being checked twice daily at this high risk time. The contract you have with your milk company outlines the conditions of supply, which includes a specified number of milkings in the colostrum mob.
- ✓ **Choose paddocks for these cows wisely.** That is do not use effluent paddocks if you can avoid them as these will be high in potassium, which increases the risk of milk fever. Don't have them graze near the calf barn as this will reduce the cows' grazing time while they instead spend time bellowing for their calf. If you are feeding PKE in trailers in the paddocks, you may need to consider where the trailer needs to be located to achieve optimum intake.
- ✓ **Aim to prevent, treat and record all animal health issues.** Are there any sub groups of cows that you learned about last season that struggle in your herd that you can treat before a problem arises such as carryovers, late calvers, cows in BCS 4 at calving. Health conditions like retained afterbirth, milk fever, assisted calvings and twins all greatly increase the chance of further complications like ketosis. Being proactive but responsible with antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and starter drenches in these at risk cows will make a big difference to their recovery and their performance for the season.

If you want to check on the performance of your colostrum cows we can check their energy status cow-side, and we can now check calcium and magnesium levels in the main clinics at our lab. This means a quicker turn-around time for you. These conditions (ketosis, hypocalcaemia and hypomagnesemia) are obvious when a cow shows clinical disease, however they are causing production and reproduction losses long before clinical signs are apparent. Therefore monitoring the herd performance is extremely useful for optimising performance. For more information about whether this extra testing may be of benefit for your herd please speak to your vet.

The key is that a cow or heifer must leave colostrum mob ready to compete with a middle-aged-aggressive cow calved 6 weeks ago!

Why is your cow down?

? Magnesium

? Calcium

? Ketosis

? Phosphorus

**IT PAYS
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PREVENTING CALF SCOURS -

Colostrum and good husbandry go hand in hand

By Rachel Hamill, Anexa FVC Veterinarian

Good quality colostrum, given in a timely fashion at an appropriate volume will go a long way to ensuring your next batch of calves are healthy and strong. Antibodies in the colostrum are like the army that protects the calf's body from invaders (the pathogens).

Minimising calf exposure to pathogens (through good hygiene and calf shed management) is also very important - the fewer invaders there are, the easier and quicker it is for the antibodies to kill them. When there are a lot of pathogens attacking at once, the antibody army can be overwhelmed and the calf can fall sick.

Colostrum management and calf husbandry go hand in hand. Getting both of these aspects right is the key to prevention.

Top husbandry tips:

- ✓ **Treat your calf trailer like a calf pen in its own right** - in some ways this is the highest risk pen, as every calf born this season must pass through it at some point. Hose out and disinfect the trailer daily with a disinfectant effective against viruses
- ✓ **Do not overcrowd calf pens.** There should be no more than 60 calves per airspace and each calf should have a minimum of 1.5 m².
- ✓ **Try to keep the age difference between calves in each pen to a minimum** - no more than 7 days age difference between the oldest and the youngest calf in each pen
- ✓ **Pens should have solid partitions** to prevent nose-nose contact between pens. If calves can communicate between pens, then your risk of disease spread is vastly increased.
- ✓ **Ensure calves have access to water from day 1.** Water troughs should be placed at a height that the smallest calf can reach, but high enough off the ground to prevent faecal contamination. Water troughs should be checked twice daily for faecal contamination
- ✓ **Bedding should be 200-300mm thick,** and should be topped up as required. Do not scrape away old bedding during the season and stir up bugs- it is better to let it lie, but top up with a good layer of fresh bedding.



- ✓ **Get down to the calf level and take a deep breath.** It should be clean. If you can smell any ammonia or staleness, there is not enough ventilation in the shed and your calves are at risk of developing pneumonia
- ✓ **Don't use high pressure hoses in the calf shed** - this may aerosolise the bugs and spray them into the pens. Use a broom to remove contaminated matter and then spray with disinfectant
- ✓ **Spray calf sheds with an anti-viral, anti-bacterial disinfectant twice weekly.** Do not spray on the calf, but you can spray around her
- ✓ **Operate an "all-in , all-out" system,** whereby calf movement between pens is limited, or ideally eliminated. Once a calf enters a pen, she should stay in that pen with her penmates, until they all go outside (unless sick, in which case she should be rapidly relocated to a sick pen)

What if it all goes wrong....

Calf scour outbreaks are extremely stressful and upsetting-Despite your care, love and attention, your babies are getting sick and dying. We're here to help. Our vets are trained for calf scour investigations. Vets on farm in an outbreak can help you get to the root of the problem, provide appropriate treatment plans for sick calves, and stop the problem from happening again in the future.

Our new lab set up allows us to do tests in-house, which means you can get faster results.

Tests that our vets will conduct during a scours investigation include:

- ✓ Blood tests looking for Failure of Passive Transfer (FPT) which means that the immune system has not been able to provide protection, due to insufficient colostrum.
- ✓ Colostrum quality tests
- ✓ Faecal cultures, to look for infectious causes of scours. These include *E.Coli*, *Salmonella*, *Rotavirus*, *Cryptosporidium*, *Coccidia* and *Yersinia*.

Discovering the cause of the scour outbreak means that you can provide appropriate therapy quickly. It can also help you stop an outbreak in its tracks and prevent the problem occurring again. **Don't battle sickness in the calf shed alone;** we're here to help.



FREE
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TESTING
for members

Not sure of the quality of your herd's colostrum?
Bring a sample into your local Anexe FVC clinic and we will test it for FREE!

Why Ear-notch Your Calves for BVD?

Have you had BVD on your farm this year? Have your neighbours had it? Did your bulk milk BVD antibody level rise after mating? Have you bought in any stock? If you answered yes to any of the above, you could have persistently infected (PI) calves born on your farm this season.

What damage does having a BVD PI on your farm do?

- ✓ **Young stock** - growth rates depressed by 20% and stock are more likely to get sick e.g. pneumonia, Rotavirus, Yersinia.
- ✓ **Milking cows - 5% drop in production** and cows that are more likely to get sick e.g. mastitis.
- ✓ **Reproduction** - conception failure, early embryonic loss, abortions, mummified foetuses, stillbirths, birth defects, and creation of a new generation of PIs.
- ✓ **Your wallet** - a local Waikato farm with 210 cows had one PI on their farm last season and it cost them over \$56,000 in losses.

To control BVD you need to control the PIs. The best time to catch a PI is before it has had the chance to do any damage. If you wait until she's in the herd you will have spent two years rearing her just to cull her before she can pay you back, plus she will have done thousands of dollars of damage to your other stock in the meantime.

Disbudding is one of the earliest procedures carried out on replacement calves, so this is the ideal time to also do a BVD test to find any PIs. Even if they all test negative, the good news is that this gives them a lifetime result. Once PI negative, always PI negative

About our Anexe FVC BVD ear-notching service:

- > The test is done by our Technicians or Vets at disbudding time so is done as early as possible, but can be done at any time to fit your schedule/management.
- > It is a newly developed test that allows PIs to be found at any age. Previously they had to be over 35 days old.
- >  **Special Anexe FVC member only pricing;** it is cheaper and easier than doing it yourself. You're busy enough anyway.
- > Just tick the box on the disbudding booking form and we'll take care of the rest.

A few things you need to know:

- > Calves must be tagged so they can be individually identified.
- > If you want the information uploaded to MINDA, then the lab testing will cost more and the calves will need to be over 35 days old.
- > If you are DNA testing, then it may be more practical to run the BVD test on the same notch taken for DNA.

Any Questions? Talk to your local Anexe FVC Vet.



Need calf feed? Talk to our Sales Reps 0800 284 3838

So what is **farmacy.co.nz** and how could it make your life easier?

Farmacy.co.nz is an online store and electronic dairy diary for our members. With increasing compliance requirements, and busy lifestyles, we wanted to offer an easy, user friendly solution to help make our members lives just that little bit easier.

- 1. Mobile friendly, therefore it is available for use anywhere:**
Designed to use easily on your mobile phone; simply take it out of your pocket to place an order, or record a cow treatment. Cow side, down in the paddock, wherever you remember you need a product or record a treatment, you can deal with it then and there.
- 2. On line ordering system:**
Order all Anexa FVC products online. This includes all our bulk products, drenches, trace element products, OTC products, consumables, and your scripted RVMs.
- 3. Multiple pick-up and delivery options for your product orders:**
Order ahead so your products are ready when you get to the clinic, or when someone is driving past to collect them for you. You can choose to pick up your order from any Anexa FVC clinic. We also have several delivery options, so we can get what you need to you as suits you best.
- 4. Electronic recording of your RVM treatments:**
A quick accurate way of recording all RVM treatments for your herd. Recommended dose rates, routes of administration and withholding periods are populated for you; just enter the cow number, disease, and treatment start date, and select your treatment option. No more transferring information from scraps of paper and whiteboards into the dairy diary - just record as you go in Farmacy.co.nz.
- 5. Enter treatment data once - we make sure it gets where it needs to go:**
We are working with several industry partners to make sure our system integrates with theirs. Keeping life simple for shed audits and supply company compliance.
- 6. Easy to see lists of treatments required, and which cows are in withholding period:**
Cows due a treatment will be listed for you, and with the click of a button you can ensure scheduled treatments are given, at the right time, and by who. Cows in withholding periods are also listed, so you can quickly see who is due to return to the vat and when.
- 7. Linked to your herd EID, year born and management tag data for accuracy:**
When you sign up to Farmacy, we upload your herd's management tag numbers, EID, and year born data from LIC. This ensures your RVM treatments are recorded accurately against the right cow number. Tag double ups or heifers coming in using culled cow management tag numbers will no longer create confusion.



Anexa FVC - Working for our farmers



The cost of membership is currently \$5.80 p.a. (incl GST). The benefits are far more valuable, Current member benefits include:

- ✓ Free subscription to farmacy.co.nz
- ✓ Free Colostrum testing
- ✓ Special BVD calf ear notching pricing
- ✓ 2% prompt payment discount
- ✓ Free milking apron
- ✓ 15% off your next petfood purchase
- ✓ Free Vet visit when vaccinating your herd for Rotavirus
- ✓ 50% off farm staff training workshops

CONGRATULATIONS to our Faceguard \$500 Hunting & Fishing voucher winners - enjoy!



Want to know more or get started with your login?
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