
DAIRY NEWSLETTER

CARING FOR CALVES IN COLD WEATHER

The calendar is only November and Mother Nature hasn't yet started her winter-wrath, but that doesn't mean the calves on your farm aren't in need of some extra attention as the temperature begins to head south. When temperatures drop below 15°C a calf less than 1 month of age must use its body fat stores for energy just to stay warm! That means when it's cool enough for you to have a sweater on to feed calves in the morning, it's time to dig out those calf blankets, change to winter bedding and consider an extra feeding to ensure calves have the extra protection they require from low temperature.

A calf is born with only 2 to 4% of their body weight as fat – this will not last long if they have to burn any of these precious resources just to stay warm. Burning body fat for heat can lead to lower growth rates, compromised immune systems, increased disease rates and even death.

COLD WEATHER BEDDING

Deep straw bedding is the best substance to use to help keep calves warm when temperatures start to fall. Straw should be bedded deep enough for the calf to nestle in, so that legs are not visible when lying down. This traps warm air around the calf, which will help to maintain body heat by raising the ambient temperature around the calf by 4°C. In addition to using enough bedding, ensuring it is clean and dry is also essential. Adding new bedding frequently is important; however moisture can easily wick up through a thin layer of clean dry bedding if a pack of wet bedding exists underneath. Consider a layer of shavings beneath the straw to help draw the moisture away from the calf.

Rule of Thumb: To assess calf bedding dryness, perform the "Knee Drop" test: you should be able to remain on your knees in the bedding for 30 seconds or longer without having damp knees.

Remember, calves are lying down 18+ hours a day - if your knees are damp after 30 seconds, the bedding is too wet!

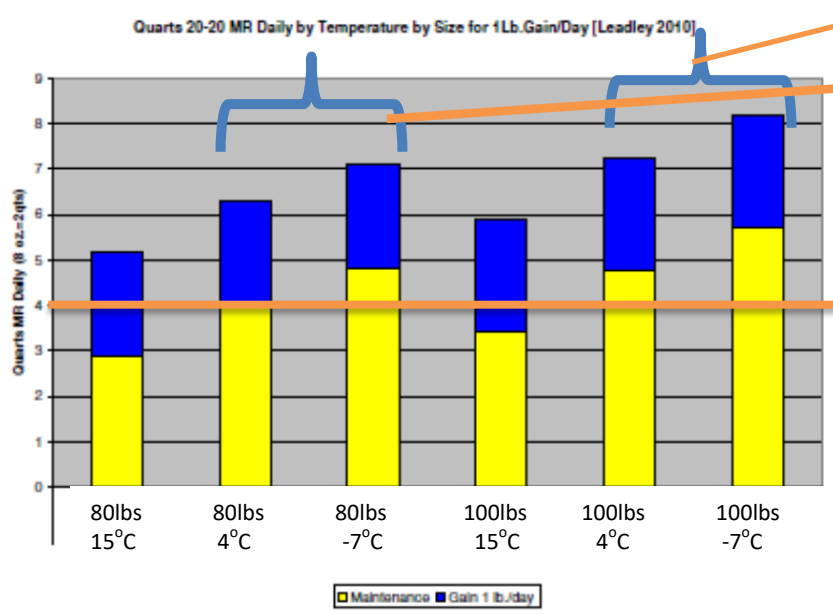
CALF JACKETS

Calf jackets are another way to protect calves from losing excess body heat. For calf jackets to be effective they should be applied once the calf is completely dried off, and should remain clean and dry throughout its wear. During the heart of winter when temperatures are consistently below freezing a calf can wear a calf jacket 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (providing they stay clean and dry!). In the spring and fall, when nighttime temperatures drop, but daytime temperatures are warm(ish) and sunny, calf jackets should be removed during the day to prevent sweating. A wet coat will be more detrimental to the calf's health!

FEED MORE ENERGY

The equation is quite simple – if more energy is “going out” just to stay warm, more energy must “go in” to maintain body functions and grow. For older calves that are transitioned well onto calf starter, more can be fed to fill in this energy deficit. For younger calves, increasing the amount of milk fed by providing an additional feeding time each day (2 vs. 3 feedings), or increasing the fat content of the milk replacer being used, are two excellent ways of getting more energy into calves during cold weather. It is not recommended to simply add more milk to a twice a day feeding schedule, as the added feeding allows for more consistent absorption of nutrients and creates a more stable rumen pH, resulting in fewer rumen health issues.

Rule of Thumb: For every 1°C the temperature drops below 5°C, increase the amount of milk being fed by 2% per day!



These calves aren't consuming enough energy for maintaining health and vigour and will be unable to gain weight under these conditions!

Figure 1. Amount of 20:20 milk replacer required for maintenance (yellow/bottom) and for 1lb/day gain (blue/top) in different temperatures. The solid line represents 4L of milk per day. As the temperature drops, this clearly is not enough to allow these calves to grow – and in some cases, is barely enough for the calf to maintain normal body functions.

ProAction Update and In Class Training

ProAction validations have been underway since September. Remember we are always willing to review CQM and ProAction records and requirements with you on farm, prior to your validation visit, to ensure everything is in order and to make the process as smooth as possible.

If you still require ProAction training to understand all of the requirements for the animal care and traceability modules, please plan to attend the next upcoming training session! Anyone from your farming operation is invited and encouraged to attend. Refreshments will be provided.

**Tuesday November 14th
1:00pm**

St. Marys Veterinary Clinic

Please RSVP to the Kirkton Veterinary Clinic to confirm your attendance.
519-229-8911