



## DAIRY'S GOT TALENT

By Bobbi Brockmann

# Are Your Newborn Calf Protocols Up to Par?

Team members at Synergy LLC in Wyoming, NY, understand that maximizing an investment in genetics starts with the calf on day one and keeping a keen eye on their newborn calf care protocols has allowed calves to thrive.

**Synergy LLC is a 2,000-cow dairy** that formed in 2004 with investors from three local dairies. The dairy is focused on developing value-added projects, such as their surrogate/live-calf service. This service allows other farms to implant their high-value embryos in Synergy's commercial herd. Synergy calves those cows out and the calves return to their original herds two weeks after birth. These calves often have high genomic numbers and are kept as elite females or bulls for stud, or they are calves bound for the showing.

"Like any dairy, we've experienced a variety of calf challenges through the years," says John Rudgers, Synergy LLC farm manager. "But, we've always been able to work closely with our veterinarian to determine the cause of those problems, correct the issue with an affordable solution and work to prevent similar issues down the road."

Getting those high-value calves off to the best start possible is a priority for the herd, but it's also a priority for their own commercial calves. To ensure future success, Synergy focuses their protocols on cleanliness, colostrum quality and cost-effective products.

"Our main goal, for either set of calves, is to have no loss due to poor care. We try to keep a clean calving area and maintain clean and sanitary practices through the

birth and feeding process," says Rudgers.

"Cleanliness is the key, every step of the way," adds Rudgers. "From delivery to movement and any touchpoints in between

– if you can keep calf utensils and facilities clean, a lot of mysterious issues go away."

It all starts in the calving area, where a Synergy team member is regularly cleaning alleys and refreshing bedding in calving pens.

From there, calves are fed one gallon of quality pasteurized colostrum. Colostrum is



*John Rudgers, farm manager at Synergy LLC, works closely with their veterinarian and calf manager to ensure future success in the cow herd. (Photos courtesy of DFA/John Rudgers)*



*John Rudgers and his daughter Charlotte check in on one of the calves at Synergy LLC.*

*Synergy LLC focuses their newborn calf protocols on cleanliness, colostrum quality and cost-effective products. One such product they use is a USDA-approved antibody bolus administered alongside colostrum.*



tested with a Brix refractometer and needs to have a value of 23 mg/mL of immunoglobulins for it to be fed. Colostrum that meets those parameters is promptly pasteurized and cooled for future use.

According to Rudgers, "colostrum is the most important thing you can do for a calf."

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"If you get quality colostrum into a calf, it makes everything else pretty easy. But, if you don't – you're putting yourself at risk for other problems down the road," says Rudgers.

Rudgers encourages all producers to test their colostrum and suggests doing bacteria tests on colostrum (if you aren't going to pasteurize) to confirm quality and verify a minimal pathogen load through your collection process.

Another safety net that Synergy implements for newborn calves is use of a USDA-approved antibody product.

"We've been using an antibody bolus for about 10 years now and we feel it's a good insurance policy for our calves," says Rudgers. "If you happen to have a hiccup in your calf raising system, that's going to protect you from completely failing that calf with something you might have inadvertently done wrong."

An antibody bolus is provided alongside colostrum, as is a colostridial vaccine and navel dipping. Navels are also dipped at every move or feeding for the first two days.

To ensure that any biofilms are removed from calf feeding supplies and equipment, the farm uses an illuminometer.

"We use the illuminometer to make sure what we're cleaning doesn't just 'look' clean, but that we're also taking care of the films that are harboring bacteria," says Rudgers.

Synergy was able to implement some of these newborn calf protocols through the help of their local veterinarians at Perry Vet Clinic. They have seen value in having two separate veterinarians for the herd – one focused on herd health and ET and one fo-

cused on calf health.

On a weekly basis, the calf manager and calf-specific veterinarian will walk through the calves to discuss specific animals. According to Rudgers, it's also good to have someone with an outside perspective.

"It's great to have an additional set of eyes look through the calf facilities. Our veterinarian may be able to see something that perhaps we didn't catch because we're there every day," says Rudgers.

Synergy is currently working with their veterinarians to dissect all protocols and make sure they are up to par.

No matter what your newborn calf protocols look like, it's never too late to review and make sure you're doing what's best for your calves.

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