Calf raising protocol at

Vir-Clar Farms

Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

Calf health stats
Number of calves on milk = 315
Average age at weaning = 7 weeks
Scour cases treated weekly = less than 3
Mortality rate = 1%

Comments:
We milk 1,450 Holsteins and raise all of our calves (both heifers and bulls) on-site. Calves are fed 1 gallon of pasteurized colostrum within one hour of birth. If we are short on colostrum, we feed the new calf one bag of Secure instead. On average, we welcome three to five babies each day. We also give InForce 3 within the first week of birth.

Calves are housed in hutches and pail-fed pasteurized whole milk until being weaned at 7 weeks. From birth to two weeks old, calves are given 3 quarts of milk at each feeding; from 2 to 4 weeks, calves receive 4 quarts of milk per feeding; and from 4 to 6 weeks, they get 6 quarts at each feeding. At 6 weeks old, calves are reduced to once-per-day feeding. The goal is to double the calf's birthweight by weaning time.

Heifers remain in hutches until 8 weeks old, at which point they are moved into a three-sided building until leaving the farm at 5 months. Bull calves are sold by 10 weeks old.

**Always consult with your veterinarian about use of products as doses may differ according to animal needs, challenges and location.*

Feeding and weaning

Newborn care

Day 0

CALF DISEASE PREVENTION

Comments: The use of First Defense and feeding high-quality colostrum within an hour of birth get calves at Vir-Clar Farms off to a healthy start. Because newborn calves are vulnerable to a variety of illnesses, a thriving calf operation requires astute attention to detail and an aggressive calf disease prevention program.

Day 1

Product: First Defense
Active ingredient: Hyperimmune bovine colostrum antibodies
Dose: One bolus
Route: Oral

Comments: This bolus is given to all newborn calves promptly following the first colostrum feeding (within one hour) to provide immediate immunity against E. coli and coronavirus – two leading causes of calf scours. After observing an increase in the number of calves being treated for scours, we went through all of our protocols with a fine-tooth comb. Although this helped, we were still seeing more scours than we considered acceptable. We liked the idea of increasing the amount of colostrum antibodies at birth, which is why we chose to use the product. Since starting the bolus, scour cases have dropped significantly.

Day 3 to 49

Product: Electrolytes

Comments: Electrolytes are used on an as-needed basis to replenish fluids and electrolytes lost through diarrhea. The electrolytes rehydrate while delivering essential nutrients to deficient calves.

Day 7 to 49

Product: Baytril
Active ingredient: Enrofloxacin
Dose: 3.4-5.7 mL per 100 lbs
Route: Subcutaneous

Comments: If calves on milk are exhibiting signs of pneumonia, we use the product to treat it.

Day 49

Product: Inforce 3
Active ingredient: Modified Live Virus – BRSV, IBR and PI3 strains
Dose: 2 mL (1 mL each nostril)
Route: Intranasal

Comments: We use this three-way respiratory vaccine to protect against bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV), infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) and parainfluenza type 3 (PI3).

Vaccines won't fix bad management

Progressive Dairyman **Editor Emily Caldwell**

If there is a "right" way and a "wrong" way to start raising calves, Katie Grinstead of Vir-Clar Dairy arguably did it the "best" way.

She had an active role in her family's Wisconsin dairy through her youth, obtained a degree in agriculture journalism at the University of Wisconsin – Madison and then spent five years as a calf specialist with Vita Plus. She worked in marketing and sales with calf raisers across the Midwest, observing a variety of operations and management styles.

When her family decided to bring the calves home rather than continue sending them to a custom calf-raiser, it only made sense for Grinstead to come home with them – a career she had been planning since college.

"With my previous job, I was able to see a lot of really good ideas and figure out how I wanted to implement them at our farm," she says.

Grinstead designed the site from the ground up, appreciating the opportunity to raise calves in brand-new hutches and with new equipment.

In fact, the only hitch she had with moving calves into the facility was that she had a baby the night after the move.

"It was pretty fun at the beginning," she says. "It still is fun. I'm really proud of our low death loss."

She attributes this success to established protocols, employees who do a great job with those protocols and a farm-wide focus on quality management rather than "fixing" problems through vaccines.

New employee training includes much emphasis on when and how to give vaccines with instruction from the farm's veterinarian.

"We want to focus on doing everything correctly so that the vaccines will work to the best of their ability," she says.

Well-trained employees have allowed Grinstead to take a larger role in managing the operation's bookwork and payroll, along with her youngstock responsibilities.

"Our goal is to do a great job of managing calves and keeping everything clean so that we don't have to give an overabundance of vaccines," she says. "We're always looking at new products, but we really strive for good day-to-day management. I have seen first-hand that vaccines will not fix bad management and poor calf health practices." ***PD***