MINIMISING CALF STRESS IN WINTER MONTHS

How Cold is Too Cold?
Calves have a zone in which they are comfortable, not too warm or too cold. This thermoneutral zone is the range of temperature in which a calf uses no additional energy to maintain its body temperature. For a newborn Holstein calf, this zone is between 10 and 25°C. Any temperature higher or lower will mean that the calf is burning reserve energy to maintain core body temperature, all of this at the expense of growth. A one-month-old calf’s thermoneutral zone ranges from 0 to 25°C.

Feed
When it gets cold, calves need more energy to stay healthy and gain weight. In extreme weather it may be necessary to adjust the milk replacer and calf starter feeding programs to cover the increasing energy needs of calves in cold weather. Research shows that calves housed at -4°C require approximately 30% more energy for maintenance. This number will increase as the temperature decreases.

A best management practice is to feed milk at body temperature, for a calf that would be about 38°C. For example, if the milk replacer you fed was at 25°C the calf will warm it up to her body temperature of 38°C. That energy used to heat up the milk came from the calf’s body resources. Don’t forget that water improves feed intake and helps develop the rumen in your calves. All calves should have a supply of clean fresh water.

Dry, Clean, Draft Free Housing
Calf housing must be clean, dry and free of draft. Proper bedding increases insulation from the earth or concrete underneath the calf. Bedding when added to a hutch or pen should be clean - free of soil, pathogens and mould. This can easily be assessed visually. Once the bedding is placed in the hutch or pen, use the “knee-drop” to test for dampness. You should be able to remain on your knees for 15 seconds or longer without having damp knees. Calves will lose heat rapidly if bedding is wet. Don’t forget, as more energy is used for maintenance, less will be available for growth and immune functions. Provide calves a place to lie down away from drafts. Dry plentiful bedding provides an insulating stable air environment and will encourage calves to lie down decreasing body heat loss in the cold environment.

Calf Coats
In colder winters, waterproof calf coats can also help decrease cold weather stress. A calf’s coat should be dry and cleaned regularly as it is its barrier to the environment and provides insulation. Calves are the future of your herd and taking care of them at a young age will decrease costs throughout the animal’s lifetime, allowing for more profitability in your operation. We have a variety of calf coats available for calves of all shapes and sizes. Maximise the health of your young stock by preventing pneumonia outbreaks.

Below are a few helpful reminders so you can keep your animals as healthy as possible:

1. Make sure your newborn calves are getting a good quantity of good quality colostrum. Ideally they should have 6lt of colostrum in the first 6 hours of life either through sucking or via a stomach tube. Colostrum quality can be tested.

Over the next few months we will be working on our database to make sure that we have the most up to date information about you and your farm. As part of this process we may need to give you a ring to check that we have your details correct.
using a colostrometer, available from the practice. If your colostrum does not fall into the ‘green’ category (i.e. good quality), and no good colostrum is available, then it must be supplemented with a product such as Locatim which provides a concentrated dose of antibodies to the calf or a colostrum replacer. Colostrum should be viewed as ‘free vaccine’, without which calves will not have the protection that they need to fight off diseases such as pneumonia.

2. Check that the stocking density for your animals is appropriate for the size of building that you have. There are recommended area requirements for animals depending on their size. A good guideline is 15 cubic metres of space per 200kg of live weight (add 1 cubic metre for each additional 100kg). We use cubic metres, as when we think of ventilation we are thinking in terms of air space not just floor space. If you are unsure of the capacity of your building then we can come out and do an on-farm investigation to help you decide what sort of stocking density might be appropriate for your animals.

3. Vaccination can be of use on some farms as a way of protecting your livestock. It is not, however, a substitute for good management practices. To find out which vaccine may be best for your animals, we would need to blood sample 5-6 animals that are between the ages of 9-12 months and have not previously been vaccinated. If these animals have antibodies in their bloodstream, they must have been exposed to the virus. This works for closed herds, since bought-in animals could have been exposed to the viruses at any point - either on your farm or before they arrived.

Other areas to consider include clipping the backs of larger animals, ensuring that the air inlets and outlets in your building are sufficient, ensuring that bedding is clean and dry, and regular cleaning out and disinfection of calf pens. Preparing ahead for the housed period may save you money in the long run through lower disease levels, fewer doses of antibiotics and improved growth rates.

A winter trip this December!

If you’re wanting to start feeling festive on the farm - you should take a trip to a Winter Wonderland in Weston, a working dairy farm with a difference! This year for the 4th successive time Graham Witter will deck the house, farm buildings and garden into a magical community event for everyone to enjoy. With a visit from Santa every Friday, Saturday and Sunday evening and a chance to have a ‘sleigh selfie’ with the North Pole celebrity this is sure to put everyone in the mood for Christmas! Having raised £17,000 so far for ‘The Donna Louise Children’s Hospice’ - this much loved community event mustn’t be missed!

Graham has assured that 2016 will be the ‘best and brightest’ display yet and he is inviting everyone to come along to join in the festive fun! With Willows Veterinary Group as proud supporters, please go along and support this event between 1st - 28th December (6.15pm - 9.00pm) at Carters Green Farm, Jack Lane, Weston, Nr Crewe.

For more information visit facebook.com/westonlightdisplay.