

Winter calf management; 2011 forage analysis recap and comparison to 2010

by Dr. Tim Snyder, Nutrition Manager, Renaissance Nutrition, Inc.

Winter calf management

To stay comfortable in winter do you put on more clothes, stay inside more, eat more or all three? When outside you probably dress more warmly and may eat more when coming in for dinner. Your calves should be given that consideration also.

Persistent cold, especially with windy or wet conditions, can lower calf average daily gain to zero. If that is prolonged without protection and/or extra energy, calves can die.

Calves grow best in cool, dry weather. Cool, variable and wet weather in fall and spring increases the chance of respiratory illness. Hot and humid weather reduces gains and can increase illness also.

Recheck hutch housing to ensure continuous dry, deep bedded straw that allows "nesting" so legs are not visible. For other housing options provide the same, and review ventilation as well. Recent UW DairyLand Initiative recommendations call for forced-air tube ventilation to provide a constant and consistent supply of fresh air

at the calf resting level. This reduces pathogen load and can reduce respiratory stress.

Consider the use of calf blankets. Ensure the calf is dry and the blanket doesn't encourage sweating. Various types are available including a "dual" blanket Renaissance offers. This allows you to remove the outer coat and keep the liner on as the calf ages or weather warms. Put blankets on at birth and for several weeks thereafter. Wash blankets between animals.

A common and effective recommendation is to add an additional feeding of

milk or replacer during cold weather. The Calf Notes website provides access to detailed calculations on extra feeding in Note #121 and #139 at www.calfnotes.com/CNliquid.htm. The calf has a greater need for energy to combat cold stress. Adding a high fat supplement to the milk or replacer will supply the needed energy without the added cost of the protein. Typically these supplements are at least 60 percent fat, can be added at 2 to 6 ounces/hd/d, go into suspension when mixed and are well consumed with the milk. Additional cold weather tips are at

<http://savacaf.com/assets/frontlines/74/frontline.pdf>

Providing warm drinking water allows the calf to warm up. Greater water intake will encourage more grain intake. The process of digesting grain produces body heat which is beneficial and reduces cold stress.

Is the ability to stay warm or added energy intake more important? A 2007 comparison of bedding and level of milk replacer fed in cold weather in Ohio, showed that using straw bedding vs shavings resulted in 5-12 percent better growth. An added milk replacer feeding improved growth 4 percent, but not if the extra milk lowered starter intake. The researchers con-

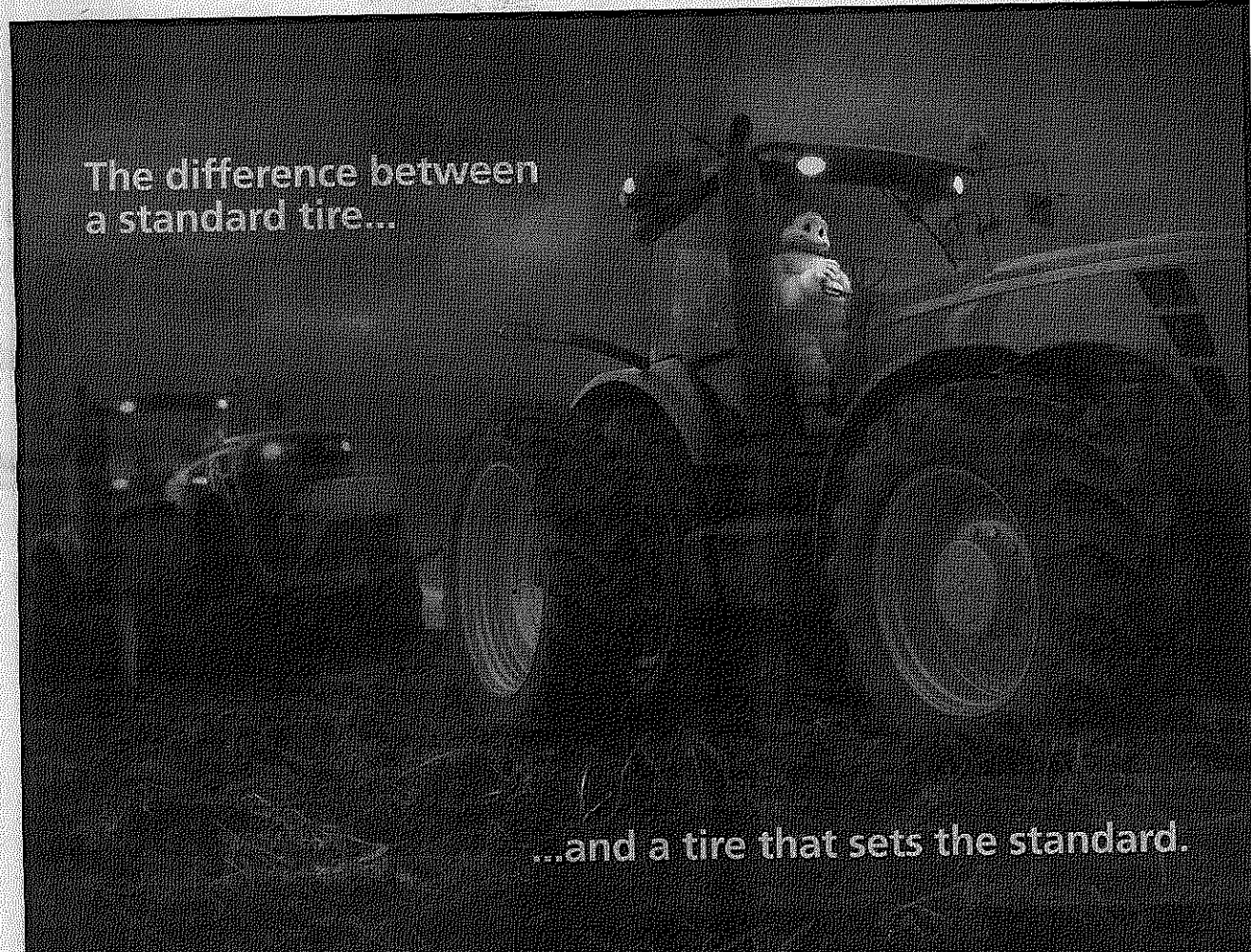
cluded "Choice of bedding material was as or more effective than MR feeding rate in improving ADG of calves in cold temperatures." (PAS 23: 656). Combining both practices can result in positive calf health and growth in cold weather.

2011 Forage Recap

A wet spring delayed planting and first crop harvest. This was followed by dry weather, then more than usual rain, including flooding. A challenging forage management year resulted in widely variable forage analysis results. This year in particular it is essential to test your forages frequently and make needed adjustments.

Early season 2011

Winter 84



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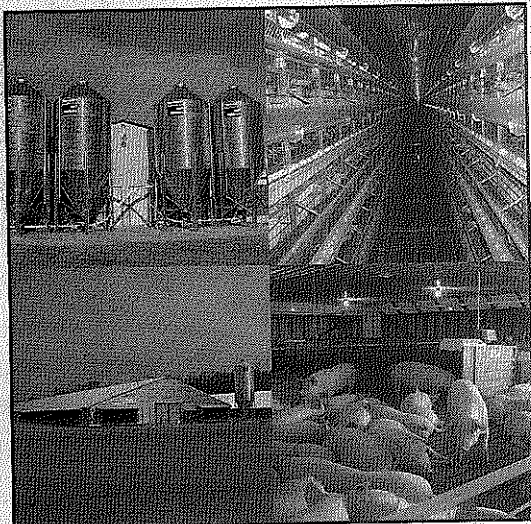
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