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## *Back to Basics*

In spite of advancing technology, dairy calf death losses remain high. To improve your odds of raising healthy, productive herd replacements, your best bets are preventing and managing difficult births, and ensuring newborn calves get adequate immunity from colostrum. This strategy will improve your herd's milk production, reproductive performance and overall bottom line. When successful, a dairy calf's birth starts a profitable lactation in the milking herd for the mother and a good start in life for another herd replacement. It is the culmination of several factors: careful planning of an ideal mating to produce an embryo that will become a milking herd replacements; dry cow management providing optimum conditions for both mother and newborn; and, in the case of a first-lactation cow, the result of 24 months of feeding, care and management before the event when she will take her place in the milking herd. All too often, this scenario for success never occurs. A difficult calving results in lost production, infection and poor fertility for the dam. Her calf may be weak and suffer from bovine respiratory disease or diarrhea. The calf, cow or both may not survive. A high proportion of illness and death in the pre-weaning period can be attributed to failure of passive transfer of immunity. The calves simply get insufficient immunity from colostrum early enough to fight off disease.

Dystocia is defined as a difficult or abnormal birth at any stage of labour. It is recorded on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 being a birth without assistance and 4 being the most severe form of dystocia requiring surgery. Half of stillbirths can be attributed directly to dystocia, and the odds of a calf dying within 24 hours of birth are much higher following a difficult calving. Calving management and procedures can greatly minimize losses due to dystocia and stillbirths. They include:1) keeping good records of breedings and expected calving dates; 2) having a clean, dry calving facility not used as a sick bay as well; 3) knowing calving signs; 4) knowing when to intervene to provide assistance; 5) ensuring newborn calves get adequate colostrum as soon as possible after birth to achieve passive transfer of immunity.

Your breeding strategy is a key factor to ensure successful calving. Choose sires to breed heifers that are ranked above average for calving ability, a combination of calving ease and calf survival. Sires are ranked according to calving ability and daughter calving ability. The next critical time in the newborn calf's life is birth to weaning. The only way a calf can get immunity after birth is through colostrum. Keys to achieving optimum IgG levels are the three Q's: quality, quantity and quickness. Feeding high-quality colostrum in the right quantity quickly after birth will greatly improve a calf's chances for survival and good health. The newborn's ability to absorb immunoglobulins through its gut wall decreases rapidly during the six hours after its' born. Dystocia and letting the calf suckle on its own have been shown to contribute to failure of passive transfer.

Difficult calvings hurt your operation economically through lower production, reproduction and calf and cow survival. Optimizing calf survival and welfare at birth involves breeding strategy, proper facilities, record keeping, recognition of calving signs, and using best practices around and during calving time. Your milking herd of tomorrow starts with the calves born today". (Blair Murray)

## FAMILY DAY

**WE WILL BE CLOSED FOR FAMILY DAY ON**

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# ON FARM SAFETY

On farm safety relates to many things including, equipment, fatigue, etc. Another level of farm safety has to do with people. Farmers have many different service people coming on their property. These people should behave in a professional and safe manner. It is expected that farm employees also work and treat these service people in the same manner. Owners, supervisors, and workers are all responsible for health and safety. This includes physical, verbal threats or harassment known as Workplace Violence. Workplace violence is a significant occupational health and safety issue and occurs when workers experience verbal abuse, verbal/physical threat of assault or physical assault, which includes fatal and non-fatal injury, as well as adverse emotional consequences in the absence of a physical injury.

Although workplace violence is typically considered a problem in select occupational settings such as law enforcement, it can also occur on farms. Workplace violence happens much more frequently than one might imagine. OSHA claims that nearly 2 million workers are the victims of workplace violence each year, with the majority involving non-fatal violence.

Workplace violence can negatively affect workers through increased stress, anxiety and fear while on the job. This can manifest into decreased job satisfaction, choosing to handle workplace violence by carrying a weapon while at work, or ultimately leaving the job. Companies can suffer tremendously from workplace violence through decreased morale and productivity, as well as increased worker absenteeism and turnover. Less often, but no less significant, employers can also face legal and security costs, as well as increases in health care and workers' compensation costs.

From a workplace violence prevention standpoint it is necessary for farmy owners and managers to measure the frequency and "types" of workplace violence occurring on their farms, in order to determine where to place their prevention efforts and resources.

Four types of workplace violence include:

- Type I – The perpetrator has no legitimate business with the workplace and carries out a criminal act on your farm (e.g. robber)
- Type II – The perpetrator is a customer receiving services or contractor providing services to your company
- Type III – The perpetrator is employed by your company and is violent toward other workers (e.g. worker-on-worker)
- Type IIII – The perpetrator has no legitimate business with the farm, but has a personal relationship with one of your workers (e.g., spouse of worker, domestic violence spills over into your farm).

The same standards and obligations should apply to all parties to act in a professional and safe manner. Farm owners must ensure that they and their employees also behave in a similar standard to contractors who arrive on their farm.

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## Signs your calves might be suffering from cold stress:

- They're shivering, breathing rapidly, or have raised hair.
- Their hooves or muzzles are excessively cold and losing color—the body could be diverting blood from the extremities.
- They're showing a decease in body temperature. 39°C is normal; cold stress begins at 38°C.

When temperatures plummet, calves exposed to the cold are more susceptible to reparatory tract infections (pneumonia) and if they're not fed adequately, they won't grow as quickly because they're using their energy to keep warm instead.

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- A good rule of thumb is to increase the amount of milk replacer by two per cent for every degree the temperature falls below 5°C.
- Introduce changes to a calf's feeding program gradually and carefully. If you're feeding more milk, provide it as an extra meal instead of increasing the size of the meals you're already feeding.
- Feed milk at a warm temperature (38.5°C) otherwise the calf uses its own energy stores to warm the milk to body temperature
- Ensure calves have enough bedding to keep them dry and warm.
- Dry off newborn calves and use heat lamps to keep them warm. Wet hair cannot insulate the calf and as the water evaporates it takes heat with it and is extremely energy-costly in young calves.