

SCOURING IN YOUNG CALVES

Scouring in calves is a common condition seen at this time of year, and as with most years many producers in Gunnedah are being hit hard by this problem. Scours can lead to large numbers of calves being lost and treatment becomes very time consuming.

The first signs seen are when the calves become quieter and go off their feed. Scours (diarrhoea) usually follows and it can be white, yellow, grey or bloodstained, and is often foul smelling.

The most important point to consider when this occurs is prompt and effective treatment. There is less chance of saving a calf if it has already become dehydrated and weak. The causes of calf scours include;

- Viruses (Rotavirus and Coronavirus).** This is the most common cause of scouring in calves. The disease usually runs a course of 3-5 days and is non responsive to antibiotics. Dehydration and energy loss usually kills the calf.
- Bacteria (E. coli and Salmonella).** E. coli scours usually occurs in the first week of life and is the result of bacterial overgrowth and toxin production. It commonly occurs secondary to a viral infection. Salmonella rarely occurs in calves <14 days old and is a very serious disease leading to rapid death. Typically the calves are rapidly depressed; the scour is watery, foul smelling and often contains blood. You should consult your veterinarian if calves are dying from scours or there is blood present. With both these conditions antibiotics and glucose containing electrolytes are necessary.
- Protozoa (Cryptosporidia, Coccidia).** Cryptosporidia affects calves from 5 days of age. It causes scours almost identical to that resulting from viruses. Dehydration and energy loss will result in the death of the calf if not treated. Coccidial infections affect young stock from 1-12 months of age. It is typified by softening of the faeces with significant straining. It is a result of poor hygiene management practices and overstocking.

The most important method of preventing scours is to provide adequate colostrum in the first hour of life. Calves are only capable of absorbing maternal antibodies in the first few hours after birth. These antibodies give the calf immunity to infection until it is strong enough to produce its own antibodies. Also short calving intervals and calving cows and heifers separately in rested paddocks can help to prevent the disease.

It is important to isolate a scouring calf immediately to avoid contamination and spread of the disease. A suitable electrolyte solution should also be chosen. Preferably the solution should contain the salts being lost, replacement energy in the form of short acting (glucose) and long acting (lactose/rice flour) and sufficient fluid to correct dehydration. It is important to follow the directions that come with the chosen electrolyte replacer, but in general the following course of action should be followed:

- Isolate the scouring calf and cease feeding milk.
- Feed the calf at least 2 litres of electrolyte replacer twice daily for 2 days (1 L per 10kg body weight) .
- Antibiotics should only be used if necessary and as advised by your veterinarian.

If the calf has not responded by day 3 or 4 then your veterinarian should be contacted. Please contact your veterinarian for further questions.

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