

# Rotavirus the most common cause of scours

For another calf rearing season, rotavirus has maintained the dubious honour of being the main cause of calf scours.

MAF's Surveillance magazine reports that for the period October to December 2002, scouring in calves was one of the most common syndromes reported by vets to Gribbles veterinary diagnostic laboratories.

Among these cases rotavirus was again the most common pathogen found, affecting calves between six days and eight weeks of age. Cryptosporidiosis was another fairly common diagnosis in calves less than three weeks of age. In many cases, they were infected by both rotavirus and cryptosporidia.

Fraser Hill, veterinary pathologist at Gribbles Veterinary Pathology in Palmerston North, says during the August to October quarter last year, the 700 or so calf scours cases diagnosed for the lower North Island showed a similar pattern.

"Rotavirus was by far the most common diagnosis, accounting for 41% of cases," he reports.

"We also found cases of coronavirus were up on the previous year, while salmonella was less prevalent than in 2001."

A similar picture emerged from Labnet's Invermay animal health laboratory. The lab reports that 50% of calf scours cases last season were accounted for by rotavirus. These were followed by cryptosporidium (32%), Salmonella Brandenburg (11%) and S. Typhimurium (7%).

Schering-Plough Animal Health veterinary adviser Roger Marchant says vaccination is a practical and effective way of preventing rotavirus scours.

"It's all about getting the ideal balance between the calf, the rearing environment and the disease organism, and because of the increased size of farms it is now a lot more difficult to get this balance."

"Dairy calves are now raised more intensively and in larger numbers than in the past, and they may also come from a variety of sources. This trend creates an ideal environment and opportunity for rotavirus infections to flourish and spread," Marchant says.

Colostrum feeding is encouraged by vets as a matter of course, so the vaccination protection against rotavirus is enhanced through this practice, Marchant concludes.

A rate of 2.5-3.5l of colostrum/day for at least the first two weeks of life is recommended.



Rotavirus was the cause of 41% of reported scours cases in the lower North Island last year.

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## Manufacture of calf feeds flourishes

The manufacture of calf feeds has been a growth industry in the past few years, according to Harvey Farms sales representative Stephen Fink.

He says in the latest Poukawa calf rearing and dairy beef newsletter the growth has happened because calf numbers have risen and rearers have moved towards a low milk, high meal based system.

Fink says about 45,000 tonnes of calf meal was made in 2002 compared to 35,000 tonnes in 1998.

Once a day feeding regimes have lifted

the importance of correctly formulated feeds, which compared to a high volume milk system, where he claims calves are getting less nutrients from milk making them more dependent on getting the right nutrients from meal.

Fink says feeds are formulated on a "least cost basis" which means calf rearers need to source the best priced raw materials to get the energy and protein specifications on the bag.

But he says the needs of a calf vary. For example, calves on a high milk system are

getting plenty of protein from milk so the protein level in the feed becomes less important. Protein also has to have the correct balance of amino acids, which can be achieved, by balancing a range of protein sources.

Energy is also important and to get high energy levels in calf feed, the raw materials must be highly digestible.

Fink also recommends feeding calf finisher pellets after the 100kg weight mark has been reached and at a time when calves are prone to coccidia infections.

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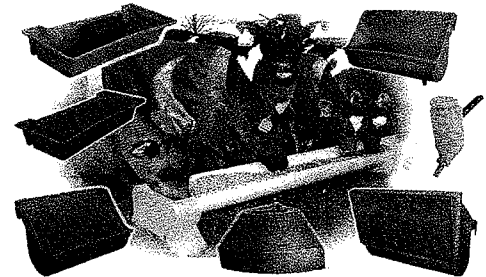
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