

Calf rearing is not without disease risks. A clean shed is a good start to preventing the spread of diseases.

Watch out for coccidiosis in just weaned calves

Coccidiosis is caused by a protozoa (coccidia) and can result in a rapid loss of weight in calves, particularly just after weaning. Most proprietary pellets have a coccidiostat added (such as rumensin) which inhibits the protozoa. Coccidiosis is generally seen if calves are taken off meal suddenly.

Calves need to be put back on meal containing a coccidiostat and then gradually weaned off the meal – this allows for gradual exposure to the pathogen and for the calves to develop immunity. Currently there are calf pellets available with increased coccidiostat levels. These pellets can be fed at a rate of 0.5kg/head/day to ensure protection against coccidiosis.

Cooperia is the main gut parasite faced by young calves.

The most cost effective treatment is a combination oral drench. Calves shouldn't need drenching until after four weeks on pasture.

Hair loss is a further problem in calves. They can get primary sensitivity that is sometimes called spring eczema. There is no conclusive data on what causes it but it appears to be via an agent in pasture. Primary sensitivity can also be caused by some scour treatments and porons. Calves recover from this relatively quickly.

Secondary photosensitivity is the result of a damaged liver. This can be caused by mycotoxins in pasture or grain and can result in skin and hair loss. Cereal grains can sometimes contain mycotoxins and a relatively cheap toxin binder can be added to the feed.

Watch for signals

Cryptosporidia is often the culprit when between 5% and 40% of young calves are scouring. This infection is caused by a protozoa (widespread throughout calf sheds) and particularly affects young calves up to 10 days of age.

The infection builds up over a few days and can affect a significant proportion of calves in the shed. The treatment is to remove calves from the milk and feed them electrolytes for a day.

If less than 5% of calves are scouring, this is often a sign of something more sinister particularly if they go down very

quickly. Potential culprits are rotavirus and salmonella. Calves should then be isolated and treated with electrolytes.

Salmonella is caused by a bacterium and can be treated with antibiotics. If it is a recurring problem on the property then young calves can be vaccinated with Salvexin. Often rotavirus and salmonella are secondary to a cryptosporidia infection, which makes treatment even more difficult.

Scouring in older calves is usually easier to deal with than scouring in young calves – the challenge is in identifying the cause and therefore the treatment.

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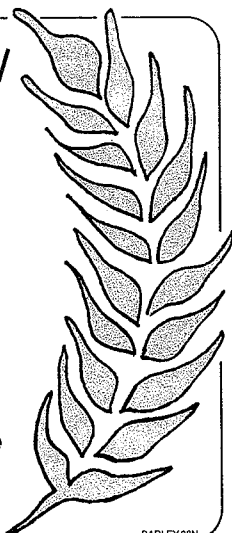
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