

Calf care

- Be maniacs to ensure that calves get 2 – 4 L of fresh, real colostrum in first 6 hours of life– **This is CRITICAL**. After 6 hours, the gut’s ability to absorb colostrum falls off dramatically and the calf won’t get enough immune antigens to have a robust immune system for the rest of its life.
- If you’re supplementing colostrum to a newly born calf (recommended!), administer the colostrum warm. Consider freezing 1 Litre plastic bags of colostrum for use later. Gently warm the colostrum in hot water. **DO NOT** put the colostrum in the microwave to heat it, as the radiation nukes the antigens in the colostrum ruining its value for calves.
- It can be helpful to put 30 ml **Calf Start** and 15 ml **Aloe** concentrate in with the first in-shed colostrum feed to boost beneficial microbe development and stimulate the calf’s immune system.
- Keep the calves sheltered and warm for the first week and if possible, have the ‘new entrants’ separated from the older calves for the first week to give their immune systems time to develop without exposure to other older calves and their bugs.
- Use fresh milk for the calves and make sure it is at 38 degrees C for the first week so that it goes into their stomach, not their underdeveloped rumen where it can’t be digested and it causes problems later. Use a thermometer to check milk temperature. Taking the time and effort to drench or bottle feed each new calf with warm colostrum in the first 3 hours and then warm milk 3 – 4 times a day for the first week will more than pay off with frisky calves and robust heifers who milk for longer and generate more profit for you.
- Use FRESH milk that you’d feel good about giving to a child. The dried milk powders have oxidized cholesterol which causes inflammation AND usually have Rumensin coccidiostat. This antibiotic contributes to antibiotic resistance and changes the calf’s fatty acid levels and sugar metabolism.
- Set up 200 L drums with hard suck teats with tubes to the bottom of the drum. Keep fresh milk in the drum so that the calves have continuous access to milk. Let them decide how much they need and when. This can make it much easier for you. Simply dump out any excess milk once a day and add new fresh, non-antibiotic milk. Clean out the drums, and if needed the tubes and teats, once a week. Fresh whole milk won’t rot but will only curdle in one day and is fine for calves to drink. Given free access, healthy calves will consume as much as 10-12 litres a day and rapidly double their birthing weight.
- Consider sprinkling lime or a lime/ quick lime mixture on floor / litter of the shed every few days to reduce microbe load. Let calves get as much sunshine as feasible.
- Use **Calf Start** in fresh milk - 15 ml every 2nd or 3rd feeding for shed calves.
- Be sure that the milk you feed to calves is from Johnes free cows. Any questionable health cows’ milk should NOT be fed to calves as Johnes can be transmitted in the

milk. We may not think of Johnes as much of a problem in NZ but it is here and needs to be dealt with very carefully.

- **For calf scours : Give 30ml Aloe and 1 ml Garlic or CEG Tincture twice a day. Increase the Calf Start to 15 ml twice a day. Consider feeding the affected calves colostrum.**
- Don't be hasty in weaning heifers off whole milk – the heavier your heifers at weaning the healthier and more productive they'll be as long-lived cows. In the wild, calves would nurse for up to a year – consider giving your future milking herd the best possible start.

Ensure continuous, free choice access to good quality hay, green grass, and humate and kelp meal for all calves. Make sure the free access hay is clean with no mould and of excellent quality. This will help to get rumen developing quickly and well – so much depends on a good start with the rumen microbes – which starts with colostrum