



THE  
WOOD  
VETERINARY  
GROUP

# FARM NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2023

## February is all about Milk!

As well as it being the month of #Februdairy, it is a brilliant time to discuss some of the aspects of milk that matter to us on farm – Colostrum for Dairy and Beef calves:

## #ColostrumIsGold

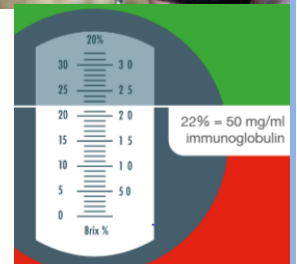
Despite a wide range of appearances, Colostrum is not all made equal. When we harvest Colostrum, it can look thick and a lovely yellow colour but both good and poor-quality colostrum can look the same so we need to find a way to test it before using it.

Colostrum not only provides antibodies that form the main part of the acquired immune system but it is also high in fat and protein to support heat regulation and energy in the first few days of life.

### 3 Qs of Colostrum:

#### Quality

- 22% or above specific gravity equates to 50mg/ml of antibodies. This colostrum is considered good quality for feeding and to store in the freezer for up to 1 year
- Refractometers are a very simple way of testing quality and uses only a droplet on the slide and can be done anywhere on farm. Order one from us at the office
- Hygiene is also very important as bacteria multiply at extremely high rates in colostrum and this directly impacts the absorption of antibodies. Make sure collection and feeding containers are immaculately clean and you have enough space to store colostrum in fridges and freezers – freezing flat in zip



lock bags then allows for maximum storage capacity

#### Quantity

- 4 litres of Colostrum or 10% of their bodyweight
- As new-borns are 60% efficient at absorbing antibodies, we need to allow for this when we feed colostrum. By feeding 10% of bodyweight we can still reach our target and provide good energy for new born animals.
- If colostrum on your farm consistently falls below 22% target or there is insufficient volume then speak to us about adjusting dry cow management to promote better colostrum production

#### Quickly

- First feed within 2 hours of birth, legally within 6hrs
- **A calf needs to suckle for 20 minutes continuously to get 4 litres colostrum in its first feed**
- You can see from the graph that the absorption of antibodies starts to decline rapidly from birth. Milk antibody levels also start to decline from the point of calving as well, so early feeding is vital to protect calves. This means that leaving the colostrum in the cow until ready to feed is not a good idea. As soon as she calves, milk production will dilute down antibodies and the antibodies degrade so harvest and feed as soon as you can

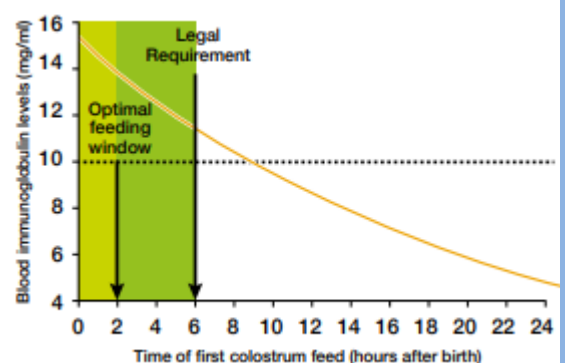
**AT RISK BEEF CALF**

NOT ENOUGH COLOSTRUM

NOT CONSUMED FAST ENOUGH FROM CALF BEING BORN

LESS THAN 20 MINUTES OF VIGOROUS SUCKING FROM MUM

FEWER ANTIBODIES ABSORBED



Newborn calves and lambs fed sufficient colostrum reduce their risk of pneumonia and mortality by over half. It also provides other nutrients, including: vitamins A, D and E which increase the absorptive and digestive capacity of the gut; enzymes and proteins which suppress growth of certain bacteria. Having a simple system that is easy to follow in place means colostrum management will be a success so think about containers, cleaning facilities, fridges and freezers today.

## Flooding

Many of you have been struggling with the extreme weather and flooding in the area causing unknown damage to spring grazing, peaks in disease such as pneumonia and mastitis due to persistently wet housing and a lot of forage crops have not been planted due to heavy machinery standing no chance on saturated fields. It also impacts the time it takes to complete everyday tasks at an already busy time of year for calving and lambing, such as feeding and checking on livestock when roads in the area are permanently or intermittently closed. Frozen flooding added an additional layer of insult to an already tricky start to 2023. We need to consider what risks remain after the water returns to the confines of the river:

- Flooded pastures will be high risk for Leptospirosis infection especially to unvaccinated animals so make sure vaccinations are done well ahead of turnout
- The main contaminants will be from flood water with human or livestock faecal material in it such as Salmonella and Cryptosporidium
- Hydrocarbons from fuel can also be an issue from main road run off. Be aware of local industrial plants that may have leached chemicals into standing water
- Where flood water has eroded the soil it can expose soil based bacteria such as Anthrax to the air causing spores
- Be conscious of Liver Fluke as the extended flooding will have increased the mud snail habitat to areas that haven't previously been a risk for fluke infection

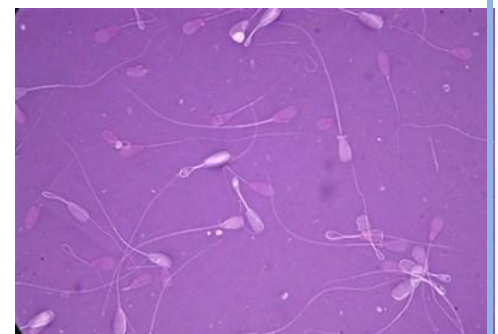


Avoid using previously flooded pastures for as long as possible. UV light and drying out will help to reduce the risks from biological contaminants. This will also promote new shoot growth and root development ensuring more pasture survives into the grazing season. You may need to graze poor pastures as “sacrifice pastures” early on to protect pastures that have potential to recover well to provide enough viable grazing for the summer months and this year's harvest.

## IS HE UP TO THE CHALLENGE?

In a year when forage is in short supply, farms need to make sure they are getting an efficient return for their investment in forages, bedding, time and labour. Whilst we ensure that cows are pregnant before committing to feed and house them in the upcoming year we are not always as strict with breeding males.

UK studies show that 30% of bulls tested were sub-fertile. Bulls need to be able to get 45 out of 50 cows pregnant within a 9-week block in order to earn their place in the breeding herd. When bulls are not fertility tested prior to breeding, performance is unknown until the PD session by which point it is often far too late to rectify without extending the calving block and increasing costs significantly. By performing a bull fertility test 6 to 10 weeks prior to the start of work, we can highlight issues ahead of service. This allows for problems to be rectified or in the worst case scenario for a new bull to be purchased and quarantined ahead of work.



Wood Vets Farm Team



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