



Dairy Tech-Line



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Tips for Healthy Calves in Cold Weather

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Cold weather is quickly approaching and the challenge of keeping calves growing and healthy has begun.

Keeping calves warm in their first few weeks is critical for accurate health and growth. A newborn calf's thermoneutral temperature, or the range of environment temperatures at which the calf does not have to actively regulate its' body temperature, is between 50-80°F. When the temperature falls below this range, and if the calves are not consuming enough energy, they can burn up their entire body fat reserve to maintain body temperature.

For example, when the temperature drops down from 55°F to 25°F, a young calf requires 1/3 more energy. And that is just to maintain their body weight and core body temperature.

Because more energy is required to maintain the calf's core temperature there is minimal energy left for growth. Consequently, calves need to be fed more energy during cold months to ensure they stay healthy.

Rich Larson, a dairy nutritionist with Hubbard Feeds, offers the following tips to ensure your calves stay well fed and warm this winter.

Six Tips

- Provide a clean, dry and draft-free hutch or pen to give calves the best opportunity to stay warm.
- Feed a milk replacer with at least 20% fat to increase energy intake.
- Increase the calves' liquid diet by 25-50%. This can be done by:
 1. Increasing the feeding rate of milk replacer powder (for example, feed 12 oz./2 quarts instead of 8 or 10 oz./2 quarts)
 2. Increasing the volume of milk fed (for example, feed an additional 1/2 to 1 quart/feeding, or add a 3rd feeding)
 3. Feeding a fat supplement, 1 to 2 ounces per feeding, designed to be mixed with milk or milk replacer.
- Keep water available to calves 30 minutes to 1 hour after each feeding as water intake stimulates starter intake.
- Milk replacer should be fed between 100-105°F. This may require the mixing temperature to be slightly higher due to rapid cooling in cold weather.
- Focus on a good calf starter management program, which will in turn maximize intake. This will result in proper rumen development and the calf will be less prone to cold stress.

Larson recommends that any feeding changes should be done slowly to allow the calves' digestive system time to adjust. Also, be sure to consult your nutritionist or veterinarian when designing or altering your calves' nutrition program.

Hubbard Feeds Inc., based in Mankato, Minn., is a leader in animal nutrition, dedicated to providing innovative feed products. Hubbard specializes in providing nutritional expertise and high quality service to help producers be more successful. Hubbard was the first major U.S. feed manufacturer to be ISO 9001 registered and HACCP certified, the international standards for feed quality management and food safety. For additional information about Hubbard Feeds, visit www.hubbardfeeds.com.