

Support calf health and reduce costs



A colostrum management system has standardised colostrum feeding on one 300-cow unit, boosting calf health and reducing costs.

Back in 2016, Salesian College's principal Derek O'Donoghue recognised that relying on the calf suckling the dam to receive adequate colostrum was not delivering the desired results. "Even without blood testing, the symptoms we had told us that calves were not getting enough good quality colostrum. We had calves with cryptosporidiosis and viral pneumonia," he recalls. "They were getting off to a bad start and we were generating work for the vets, as well as additional stress for ourselves."

Mortality rates for calves from the 300-cow spring-block calving herd were higher than desirable, so the college introduced a number of management strategies, including a revised approach to colostrum feeding. The team now ensures that every calf receives four litres of colostrum within 45 minutes of birth. And, in order to achieve this, Mr O'Donoghue believes that investing in a Store & Thaw colostrum management system has been crucial.

"To get colostrum into the calf quickly, you need a system in place to store, heat and administer it. This system facilitates colostrum management," he explains. Store & Thaw is a water-bath system that can be heated to varying temperatures. Bags of colostrum are put into two metal cages and submerged in the bath where they can be heated to the desired temperature. This can be used to evenly defrost colostrum

at between 40°C and 45°C, which avoids damaging the immunoglobulins. Water circulation around the cages also speeds up the process. The system can also be used to warm colostrum to feeding temperature. Mr O'Donoghue believes that improvements in calf health have been considerable. After just one year on the colostrum system, the team also had the confidence to stop using a preventative treatment for cryptosporidiosis called Halocur. There have been no cases of cryptosporidium seen in calves and just a few calves have developed pneumonia.

Reduced costs

"We're not treating calves now. Before we would have lost calves, despite treatment. We would have had calf mortalities at between two and three weeks of age due to cryptosporidium. We were treating them with Halocur and using a lot of electrolytes. We're using a minimal amount now." He adds that vet costs have also reduced by between 10% and 15%, and heifers are also now reaching their full potential. Overall, he believes that Store & Thaw is key to their success.

"It's the best thing since the quad bike, which just makes life easier. The Store and Thaw reduces the labour requirement. It creates some work in collecting colostrum, but it's reducing cost and work later on – as well as preventing calf mortalities. And it's inexpensive to put in place." |



Colostrum protocols

- Colostrum collected in individual bucket at first milking
- Put in four-litre bags and labelled with dam information. Previous colostrum testing has given the team confidence that supplies are good
- Put in colostrum fridge
- When cow starts to calve, colostrum bag taken from fridge and warmed in Store & Thaw – the process takes less than 15 minutes
- Warmed colostrum put in a plastic bottle and used to tube calves
- Colostrum is between 31°C and 32°C at feeding.