

Preventing and dealing with a calf scours outbreak

A major calf scours outbreak is an extremely stressful experience at a time of year when dairy farmers are already stretched to their limit. Preparing now for the calf rearing season can save you a headache later on.

- > Sort out drainage issues – in the middle of the season you should be able to sit on the bedding material and not feel moisture through your clothing.
- > Install solid partitions between pens – this prevents direct contact between calves in different pens, preventing scours spreading through the whole shed. Plywood is adequate.
- > Prepare a sick pen, well away from other calves – leaving sick, scouring calves in a pen spreads infection to other healthy calves.
- > Review protocols – how is colostrum to be managed? How often are pens to be sprayed out? How are sick calves to be managed?
- > Train staff – ensure that everyone follows the same script this spring.
- > COLOSTRUM, COLOSTRUM, COLOSTRUM – every calf must be fed fresh, first milking colostrum within the first 12 hours of life. This is the most effective calf scours prevention measure. Calves should be picked up twice daily. First milking colostrum needs to be held separately to pooled colostrum, and it needs to get to the calf sheds before each calf pickup.

Even the best prepared operation can experience scours. Dealing with calf scours aggressively can halt an outbreak in its tracks.

- > Remove any scouring calves as soon as you notice them and put them in the sick pen. Top up the bedding in the affected pen and thoroughly spray the pen out with a broad spectrum disinfectant. Through the season feed healthy calves first, treat and feed sick calves last and then thoroughly clean and disinfect yourself and equipment.
- > Testing scour samples early in the outbreak to identify the cause will allow you to make the best treatment decisions. On farm test kits are available from your local PGG Wrightson store.
- > Electrolyte feeding – calf scours can cause severe dehydration and the depletion of crucial electrolytes (sodium, chloride, potassium and bicarbonate). Ensure your electrolyte solution meets the complete electrolyte needs of the scouring calf as many cheaper solutions only deliver salt and sugar.
- > Milk feeding – I recommend that you continue milk feeding throughout the treatment period and offer electrolyte solution to sick calves at intervals throughout the day. Do not dilute milk with electrolyte solution, feed at separate times at least two hours after the milk feed. Withholding milk deprives the calf of energy and protein at a time when they need energy to fight infection. A good quality electrolyte with citrate as an ingredient helps maintain milk clotting ability.

For more advice and to prepare your farm for calf rearing, contact your local PGG Wrightson Technical Field Representative.



Calf Electrolyte

Fast acting electrolyte salts designed to assist rehydration of calves that are scouring. Available in 1.8 kg, 3.6 kg or 8 kg.



Calf Scour Paste

Stabilise offers a multi strain probiotic that re-establishes beneficial bacteria in the gut and digestive tract. It is suitable to use on animals suffering from stress due to transport, weather change, housing environment and feed changes. Nil meat withholding.



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