

Beef Calf Viability - Check The Suck Reflex



SAC Consulting have released the following findings on calf suckling within the first 4 hours.

For beef calves, ensuring good calf viability is essential for rapid and sufficient ingestion and absorption of colostrum. Many of the young suckled calf losses that have been seen relate in some way to hypogammaglobulinaemia.

The University of Calgary has recently carried out a research project looking at factors which can be assessed in the newborn calf to predict whether they will ingest colostrum in the first four hours of life which has some practical findings of use as this year's spring calving progresses:

Not surprisingly, dystocia was a strong predictor of whether a calf would ingest colostrum or not. Calves were assigned a score of:

- 1 – no assistance
- 2 – easy assistance
- 3 – difficult assistance

The table below shows the percentage of calves in each category which failed to suck within four hours.

Dystocia Score	Percentage of calves which failed to ingest colostrum within 4 hours of birth
1	14
2	39
3	64

In addition to this, the suck reflex after birth was also found to have a strong correlation with the likelihood of ingesting colostrum. The information below combines the dystocia score with the suck reflex to illustrate the likelihood of a calf failing to ingest colostrum within 4 hours of birth given the degree of calving difficulty and whether the suck reflex was weak or strong.

1) No Assistance At Calving

- Plus Good Suck Reflex = **8 % failed to ingest colostrum**
- Plus Poor Suck Reflex = **78 % failed to ingest colostrum**

2) Easy Assistance

- Plus Good Suck Reflex = **26 % failed to ingest colostrum**
- Plus Poor Suck Reflex = **94 % failed to ingest colostrum**

3) Difficult Assistance

- Plus Good Suck Reflex = **49 % failed to ingest colostrum**
- Plus Poor Suck Reflex = **98 % failed to ingest colostrum**

It is interesting that 78 % of calves not thought to have had difficult calvings, but with a weak suck reflex failed to ingest colostrum within 4 hours. This likely reflects calvings which were unassisted, but took a long time to occur, leaving the calf hypoxic and acidotic.

The message from this is that particular attention should be given to ensuring colostrum administration in calves which have a weak suck reflex after birth as well as those which have had a difficult calving.

Call us for more information

Routine opening hours
Mon - Fri 8.30am - 6.00pm
Sat 8.30am - 12.00 noon

24hr Emergency Services
Tel: 01746 713 911

APHA Briefing Note 10/17

This is an advisory notice we have received from the APHA regarding the CHeCS TB health schemes in England and Wales

There are two Cattle Health Certification Standards (CHeCS) accredited health schemes available for bovine TB in England and Wales.

These new TB schemes require the farmer and their vet to work together on a number of biosecurity measures. Similar schemes have already helped farmers implement successful disease control programmes for five other cattle diseases. The farmer must first choose from one of two CHeCS accredited health schemes (see opposite) and then work with their vet to implement the scheme biosecurity measures on-farm.

APHA will continue to organise TB testing and the scheme providers will have access to the test results with the agreement of the farmer. Using the last 10 years of test data the scheme provider will award the herd a starting status, from 0-10, to reflect the number of years the herd has been TB-free. This means homebred animals marketed from these herds can then be sold with that status, subject to a signed declaration from the farmer's vet.

The herd's 'score' will increase each year it remains free from TB. The schemes will benefit farmers selling cattle that are located in a high TB incidence area and are free of the disease, those who wish to minimise exposure from bought-in animals, and those wanting to reduce the risk of TB in their herd.

Further Information

If you wish to know more, please visit www.checs.co.uk to read the technical standard, programme handbook and Q&A. If it sounds advantageous to you, please discuss joining the scheme with your vet and then the participating CHeCS accredited health scheme listed below.

Premium Cattle Health Scheme

- Tel: 01835 822 456
- Email: pchs1@btconnect.com
- Web: www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120112/premium_cattle_health_scheme

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Severn Edge Farm
The Bull Ring
Hollybush Rd
Bridgnorth
WV16 4AR

Tel: 01746 713 911
www.sevg.co.uk/farm

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