

Alliance

Is the Teeter-Totter in the Right Position

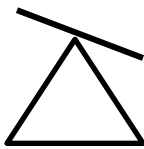
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Teeter-totter? What am I talking about? This is an article on calves, right? Well, what I am talking about has to do with the balance between the immune system of the calf and the disease challenges present. The goal is to have healthy calves that will grow more efficiently and finish better.

It is early spring and while we have already enjoyed some unseasonably warm weather, we may still be in for some rainy fluctuating weather over the next few weeks. Last year, for the most part, we enjoyed good to great animal health. While the spring was nonexistent, our summer temperatures were moderate in terms of heat stress and precipitation.

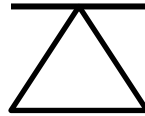
I would like you to consider the following diagrams:

A)



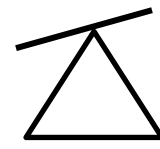
Immune System > Disease Challenge
Calves look great and production is great!

B)



Immune System = Disease Challenge
Calves look ok and production/growth is ok!

C)



Immune System < Disease Challenge
Calves are sick and production is poor!

When the weather is warmer and even steady then we have A) and B) but as the weather brings on challenges through fluctuation, dampness/humidity or cold then we have situation A moving to situation B and many people do not see this. The phone starts ringing when we move into situation C).

What can you do besides buying a new pair of glasses? Remember the basics and follow them:

1. Buy quality - watch as farmers dump poor calves on the market due to poor prices.
2. Do not overcrowd - know what your facilities can hold and stick to it.
3. Keep the bedding dry - do you want to kneel in it?
4. Can you breathe down where the calves are?
5. Draft versus ventilation - you need to visit the barns more, more trips to adjust the curtains. One suggestion for curtain barns is to get a product called "Shade Cloth" and is available through the natural ventilation companies such as Faromor and Sun-North, as well as the greenhouse industry. This cloth comes in different "porosity" but it is suggested that you use 40% porous (60% solid fabric). It acts like a window screen - breaks up the force of the wind and slows it down but still lets a reasonable amount of air through. For our crazy autumns and winters when

it warms up and is sunny you can roll down the curtains but if it turns nasty in a hurry then the air is shattered as it comes through and no nasty direct wind can come in directly on the calves.

6. Always have air exchange; closing things up real tight is never a good idea unless an absolute emergency.
7. Feed more, feed more, feed more! For the winter, feed 150 gm/l and 6.0 litres as a bare minimum. Many farmers feed over 1.0 kg of milk powder per day and feed a milk powder with minimum 20% fat. Fat is not the expensive part of the milk replacer so don't be penny wise and pound foolish. More energy equals fewer drugs. More and more farmers are realizing that the veterinary research is true, if you feed calves more, they will have improved growth, stronger immune system and a smoother transition at weaning.
8. If you have been getting away with cutting corners in warm dry weather, remember that it will catch up with you! You will get burned with rainy, fluctuating, damp and/or cold weather. Monitor calves closely and be prepared to spend more time in the barn. Early intervention is key!
9. Remember, there is nothing new under the sun. We have the diseases that we have within the production system that we have. At any point, the factors for a healthy and productive calf can change and the teeter-totter can switch to the other side!
10. Are you ready? Do you know what you are doing wrong? Are you willing to correct any issues and do what is required to keep calves healthy during the cool, wet season?

The longer I work with calves, the more I believe it is the human factor that dictates success. We all must make decisions based on facilities, time, experience and economics. The economics for veal are tough but for those that are left you must have what the markets want. The better that we start these calves and grow them, the better they will be finished for the newly enforced weight requirements. Do not hesitate to contact your veterinarian to ensure that your feed prescriptions are up to date, and vaccination protocols are appropriate. There are a few new products available on the market to treat sick calves, so make sure you are informed.