



Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan Inc.

Colostrum: It's Important

Newborn calves have virtually no immunity of their own. Antibodies are transferred from the cow in colostrum (first milk). These antibodies protect the calf from disease for the first two months until the calf begins to make its own antibodies.

Significant absorption of antibodies only occurs in the first 12 hours of life. After that time most antibodies are digested, although some can act locally in the gut. It is essential calves receive colostrum within a maximum of 12 hours to develop immunity to infectious agents they may meet in the first two months of life.

Management:

- ideally calves should nurse within the first 6 hours after birth for maximum absorption of antibodies
- weak or mismothered calves should be tubed with colostrum collected fresh or stored (frozen and thawed in warm water when needed); colostrum from any cow can be used

To Tube Calves:

- obtain a tubing kit from your veterinarian or an enema kit from a pharmacy
- restrain the calf standing or sitting down – but upright
- measure the tube against the calf to estimate how much must be passed to reach the stomach; mark the tube
- introduce the nozzle of the tube into the calf's mouth gently; don't lift the head
- let the calf swallow
- to be sure you are in the right place you should be able to feel the tube pass down the neck; if you can feel the tube then you know you are not in the windpipe
- gently pour down 1–2 litres of colostrum
- clamp off the tube and remove

Notes on Colostrum:

1. A calf needs 1–2 litres of colostrum within 2–12 hours after birth. Almost all calves that "sicken" with diarrhea, navel ill, septicemia (blood poisoning) or pneumonia have failure of passive transfer (FPT) of IgG (colostral immunoglobulins) from cow's first milk.

2. Take note of calves that have not nursed properly within 2–3 hours post-partum. A judgement on action to be taken should be made.
 - a) In cold weather calves will chill and may not nurse in time. They should be tubed because colostrum provides readily available energy as well.
 - b) On a warm day give the pair more time.
 - c) Assume an apparently abandoned calf has not suckled and should be fed.
3. Be prepared for mothering and nursing challenges by taking advantage of opportunities to collect colostrum from cows that have lost calves or that have an abundance of first milk.
4. Fresh colostrum, on a busy day during the calving season, may be kept at room temperature. If no calvings occur, fresh colostrum can last 7–10 days in a refrigerator. Freeze extra colostrum in 1–2 litre lots for easy storage and thawing.

Other CattleFACS available:

- Animal Health Concerns When Pastures and Feed are Limited (Drought)
- Annual Crops for Emergency Grazing
- Body Condition Scoring
- Calf Scours Overview
- Calving, When and How to Help
- Cancer Eye
- Carcass Quality Shortfalls
- Cattle Handling, In the Zone
- Creep Feeding Calves
- Early Weaning of Calves
- Euthanasia in Cattle
- Feeding in a Cold Snap
- Feed Testing and Ration Balancing
- Managing Water Supplies in a Drought
- Nitrate Poisoning
- Non-Ambulatory Cattle (Downers)
- Not Enough Feed for the Winter?
- Problem Feeds



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502 - 45th Street West, 2nd Floor, Saskatoon, SK S7L 6H2
Phone: 306-249-3227 Fax: 306-244-4497
e-mail: facs@sasktel.net
website: www.facs.sk.ca

FACS represents the livestock industry in advancing responsible animal care and handling practices in agriculture.

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Receipts are issued for all memberships.

This FACS initiative is funded by the Saskatchewan Beef Development Fund and endorsed by the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, Saskatchewan Cattle Feeders Association, Saskatchewan Dairy Association, Saskatchewan Livestock Association, Saskatchewan Livestock Markets and Order Buyers Association, Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association.