

NAVAN VETERINARY SERVICES JULY 2016 NEWSLETTER

In recent dairy articles it has been written, often, that there is a long term milk production benefit to having calves double their birth weight by 56 days of age. Dr. VanAmburgh at Cornell University has written that 20-30% of milk production is genetics driven and the rest (70-80%) is management and environment. The milk production benefit can range from 700-800 kg in first lactation alone. A Wisconsin study has shown that feeding 2 litres colostrum versus 4 litres colostrum at birth has benefits as well. The group fed more colostrum was taller at 80 days of age – 3cm more hip height, gain 0.2 kg more weight per day by breeding age and produced 11% more milk in 1st lactation and 17% more milk in 2nd lactation.

All this information does lead us to a critical question. “What is the best age at first calving for today’s heifers?” Understood that by weight and height, these heifers reached breeding targets by 11-12 months of age leading to age at 1st calving of 20-21 months if bred and pregnant.

Data from Ontario DHI on the attached chart does show us some interesting information. The number on top of each bar is the number of 305 day records in each age group.

- 1) there is no benefit to delaying age at 1st calving past 24 months.
- 2) there is not real benefit to push age at 1st calving younger than 22 months.
- 3) on average the group calving between 21-23 months produced 300kg more milk than the group calving between 24-26 months.

With good breeding results from heifers, age at 1st breeding does not need to occur before 13 months of age.

Lately there have been many discussions related to cross milking sucking calves resulting in blind quarters. This seems to be more prevalent in calves fed in group, robotic systems. Even though it was believed that there should be less in these systems as calves can essentially go to drink whenever they are hungry. Three important management strategies in robot fed calves are

- 1) Volume of milk per day – 12 litres
- 2) Volume fed per meal – 2.5 to 3.0 litres
- 3) Gradual weaning over 14 days

These are important rules to follow for good calf growth as well as to minimize cross sucking.

Now we have additional tips to promote healthy calves with minimal cross sucking.

- 1) Use a nipple with a slow delivery rate such as a “peach nipple”. Slower drinking delivery means calves will feel fuller at the end of a meal and less likely to suck each other.
- 2) provide water right from birth.
- 3) feed hay or a straw pellet mix from 7 days of age. The straw pellet mix should be 15% straw, chopped to 2-3 cm in length, with 85% starter pellet.
- 4) build a swing gate in at the milk station to help keep a calf in the stall longer to promote dry teat sucking as well as to protect timid calves from older calves.
- 5) wean calves a little older – 10 weeks of age especially if the calf is a little smaller.
- 6) place non-nutritive dry nipples in pen to offer an alternative to cross sucking.

HAVE A GREAT SUMMER!!!

SALMONELLA DUBLIN

The Ontario Animal Health Network is doing a study on the prevalence of Salmonella dublin in our dairy herds.

Salmonella dublin can cause diarrhea and more often non treatable pneumonia. Affected animals can become persistent carriers.

In this study a random selection of 500 dairy herd bulk tanks are being tested. Also in the study are payment for 2 post mortems of calves either done by ourselves or at the vet lab in Kemptville.

In order to be accepted for the post mortem part of the study you need to have completed a questionnaire with one of our vets. This questionnaire is not long or difficult to fill out and is a good way to get calf disease diagnosis performed on calves that may die on farm.