

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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*“Minimizing Scours in Young Calves”*

The importance of limiting exposure to disease has been at the top of the minds of those in the animal production industry the past few years. Many of these disease prevention strategies apply to cattle, specifically newborn calves. According to Dr. Brad White, with the K-State Beef Cattle Institute, prevention and early detection are two keys in reducing the spread of disease in newborn calves. One disease that we should be greatly concerned about is scours or diarrhea.

Scours will often impact calves in the first month of life because of their developing immune system, and if they lose too many electrolytes, they can develop metabolic acidosis, which can be fatal if not properly and promptly treated. Once the calves reach that one-month mark on age they are much more resilient to the severe effects of scours.

The common way this disease is transmitted is animal-to-animal. You can minimize the risk of spreading by how the cows and calves are managed during the calving season. Keeping older calves away from the newborns is one method. These older calves tend to shed a lot of germs, putting the newborns at a higher risk of contracting scours if not some other disease. It is recommended to have multiple calving pastures. The way this looks is that every 2-3 weeks, the pregnant cows are moved to a new location thereby leaving the cow-calf pairs in the pasture where they calved. When you do this, you can be sure that the pregnant cows are calving in to a clean environment in their new pasture.

Another method is to focus sanitation and age-separation efforts on calves born to heifers since these calves are less likely to consume enough high-quality colostrum compared to the calves born to cows. Good nutrition prior to calving is key to help make sure the cows are giving the calves optimum immunity. Antibodies in the colostrum passed from the mother to her calf is the calf's first defense against many of those pathogens, so it is important to have the cows at a body condition score of five or six when they calve.

It is also a good idea to provide hay to cattle by rolling it out during calving season instead of offering it in round bale feeders. When you use round bale feeders it can lead to a lot of manure buildup in a small area, which increases the risk of disease spread. Rolling the bales out may lead to more hay wastage, but it may be worth the increase in disease spread prevention.

Information comes from K-State University Beef Cattle Institute, Dr. Brad White, Dr. Bob Larson.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension - Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.