

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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“Vitamin A Deficiency in Cows: Leading to Weak Calf Syndrome”

Kansas State University beef systems specialist Jaymelynn Farney is urging cow-calf producers to maintain appropriate levels of vitamin A in their herds to help minimize scours in calves and reduce retained placenta in cattle. She recommends 30,000-45,000 international units of vitamin A per day for bred cattle to increase the chances of minimizing calf scours.

Some of the best sources of vitamin A include legumes, alfalfa, current year hay crop, lush leafy green forage, winter cover crops, and yellow corn.

A classic symptom of vitamin A deficiency is weak calf syndrome. Those calves are not as thrifty and if they do not get up and nurse, the cow's colostrum is likely low quality. Vitamin A contributes to higher quality colostrum. Calves deficient in vitamin A are set back their entire life, if they do make it past birth. Calves suspected of having weak calf syndrome should have samples sent to a lab for testing and the producer should work with a veterinarian and nutritionist for diagnostics. If your animals are on dry, dormant forage, they are essentially getting no vitamin A at the time. When cattle consume excessive amounts of vitamin A, they store it in their liver. When their requirements are not being met, they will use that storage to meet their requirements. Cattle may have 2-4 months of vitamin A stored in them.

Producers should also be aware that vitamin A does not have a long shelf life. It will lower in quality every month and needs to be used within a year but preferably within 6 months.

Information comes from K-State beef system specialist, Jaymelynn Farney.

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 at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office 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.