

# Weekly Article

2-13-2023

## Healthy Start = Healthy Feeder Calves

Hello, my name is Richard Purdin with OSU Extension, Ag and Natural Resource Educator, and Community Development Educator for Adams County. I hope to better inform local producers and the public of the latest news in the world of agriculture. As I started writing this article I had to take a second look at the calendar to confirm that it is truly Mid-February! I can't believe how time fly's and it truly does not feel like February but rather more similar to March with warm and windy days. Speaking of wind, we have received our fair share of that in the past week with wind gusts reaching 50+ mph, and many structures, trees, and skinny Ag agents were blown away. Talking to some producers this past week the wind created some extra chores cleaning up debris and fallen trees but on the other hand, it did do wonders for drying the soil out. Farmers have taken advantage of sold soil conditions with manure applications, fence row cleaning, fence building, moving hay, tile installation, and even some tillage. Calving season has also started for many producers, the warmer weather has been a blessing for young calves hitting the ground running! For the cow-calf operator, calving season is the most rewarding and stressful time of year. When calves have a healthy start they are more likely to grow faster and healthier throughout the rest of their life. There are multiple factors that can affect the health and well-being of newborn calves, often farmers dwell on inclement weather. Weather and environment are key factors in calf health but there are many other factors at play. If you are beginning calving season consider the following steps to aid in getting your 2023 calf crop off on the right hoof.

1. **Create a good environment-** Every farm operation is different, no matter if you have a calving barn or outside calving lot, it is important to provide a clean, dry, and warm environment. If you do have a barn make sure the bedding is clean and dry. Maintaining good ventilation is critical as well, make route walks through the barn to monitor ammonia gas build-up, especially when we have wild weather changes. For outside calving, separating mother and calf from the other herd to avoid loafing around feed areas can avoid trampling and manure build up on the mother udder which can transfer pathogens to young calves as they nurse.
2. **It all starts with Mom-** Before calving begins the mother cow should be fed a high-quality ration meeting her maintenance needs and the need to produce a calf. High-quality forage, supplementing high-calcium legumes such as alfalfa or red clover hay can increase calcium amounts in the mother's milk. Supplementing grains to brood cows can help optimize milk

production and colostrum quality as well. Studies show cows with body condition scores in the range of 5.5-6.0 will deliver healthier vibrant calves with lower cases of dystocia (difficult birthing).

3. **Remember the number 4-** I have heard a lot of different amounts of time that can pass before calves should receive colostrum. Today most of the best results are when calves nurse and receive colostrum within the first four hours and no longer than 12. Calves that receive colostrum either of their own free will or manually by the manager in the first four hours after birth will grow healthier and faster through weaning. Baby calves' ability to absorb nutrients from colostrum begins to decrease after 1 hour and greatly decreases after 4 hours.
4. **Keep an eye on the baby's bottom-** the first 30 days of life newborn calves are very susceptible to scours, keep a close eye on the stools of the calf. In Some instances, scours could be caused by overconsumption of milk (especially in high-production cattle). In other cases, scours could be caused by pathogens from fecal material or lack of colostrum consumption.
5. **Vaccinate cow or Calf-** Vaccinating the cow in the last trimester can allow immunity to be passed on to the calf but if this is not done vaccinating calves between the time of birth and three months of age with a 4-way IBR, BVD, PI3, and BRSV is a good practice.
6. **Get the hard stuff done when they are young-** Taking time to castrate and dehorn when calves are 3 months of age or less will make for healthier faster growing calves at weaning time.

**Other information:**

- March 10<sup>th</sup> 6:30-9:00 pm, Bull Buying School located at Raines Farm and Greenhouse 2667 Nichols Ridge Road Seaman Ohio 45679.
- Horse Clinic will be held at the Seaman Community Center 17806 State Route 247, Seaman, Ohio 45697, on March 15<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 pm-9:00 pm. Call the office at 937-544-2339 to register or email me at Purdin.19@osu.edu.
- Deadline to make Agriculture risk coverage (ARC/PLC) elections is March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Call the local USDA, FSA office at (937)544-2033 to learn more.

**Ag Educator Words of encouragement** – “At the very heart of agriculture is the drive to feed the world” **Ben Potter**