



Taking Charge of Calf Health

by **Brooke Byrd**

Prevent calf trouble before it starts.

DENVER, CO (Feb. 1, 2006) — As part of the American National CattleWomen Inc.'s (ANCW) "Day of Education," speakers from Schering-Plough discussed preventative measures for dealing with calf problems. Joe Roder, DVM, spoke about prevention and treatment of calf scours, while Mark Spire, DVM, discussed summer calf management.

Prevention is best option

Calf scours "is something best prevented," Roder said. "If we can prevent it, we're much further ahead." The first step to preventing calf scours is to take care of the cow.

"We need to keep her in better body condition," he said. If the cow is in better condition at calving, her calf will have a better chance of survival because of the quality and amount of colostrum produced.

Roder explained that calves are born immunologically naïve. "They depend on the colostrum they get from momma," he said.

Because the calf's ability to absorb colostrum declines to 50% within 6 after birth and is very limited 24 hours after birth, Roder stressed that the calf needs to receive at least 1 quart of colostrum

in the first six hours of life. Only then, he said, "can we feel confident that the immunity momma has, has been fairly adequately transferred to her calf."

The most important thing to remember in treating scours is "fluids, fluids, fluids," Roder said. "Our goal is to replace the body weight lost." Oral fluid therapy, similar to that used on humans with diarrhea, is available for cattle.

Roder cautioned against pulling milk away because calves need the fluid, energy and protein to battle the various scours-causing viruses and bacteria.

Other methods of prevention, Roder explained, are segregation and isolation. "We want to keep calves separated by age," he said. In addition, sick calves should be worked last, and all equipment and clothing should be kept clean and disinfected.

Managing calves in summer

Spire, technical service manager for Schering-Plough, discussed summer management methods for beef calves, noting the importance of focusing on management practices that allow a calf to reach its genetic potential.

The first step of summer

The average age for castration is 70 days, Mark Spire said. “Do it when it’s easiest. Do it when they’re small.”

management is vaccination, he said. He advised against vaccinating calves at weaning time, since the body’s reaction to the stress of separation would outweigh any vaccination benefits.

“I don’t do anything at weaning if I can avoid it,” he said.

Implants are another option, he said, that “can move animals beyond what their genetic potential is.” However, he cautioned producers against implanting heifers too early and against implanting bulls meant for reproduction.

Castration and dehorning are both procedures that can create uniformity in a group of calves. “The earlier, the better” applies for each, he said.

The average age for castration is around 70 days, while the average age for dehorning is about 130 days. “Do it when it’s easiest,” he said. “Do it when they’re small.”

About 73% of producers use

some form of parasite control, Spire noted, but fewer people use control for internal parasites, because internal parasites can’t be seen.

Of the money spent on animal health, he said, “parasite control is the biggest percentage by far.” However, he warned, “when we treat and what we treat with vary across the United States.”

Other tools Spire suggested included trace mineral programs, creep-feeding and early weaning. Of the summer management options in general, he said, “Almost all of these are going to give us a positive return on investment.” For more suggestions and information on these management programs view the PowerPoint demonstration accessible in the newsroom at www.4cattlemen.com or contact Spire directly at (785) 537-3857.



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