

Animal Health & Milk Quality

Edition 2

Spring Management Series 2024



Farmer Focus



Kieran McDermott
Corkimmons, Clones, Co. Monaghan

Farm Profile

Farm Size: 55 Ha

Cow Nos.: 87

Calving start date: 7th February

Managing a sick calf

On the McDermott farm scour is not a major issue. This is mainly down to the massive effort put into hygiene and colostrum management on farm. If a calf does take scour, it is generally just a slight milk scour. Kieran has a scour test kit in the calf shed which is used to make sure the diagnosis is correct. Once Kieran has noticed the calf is unwell, he will firstly isolate the calf into one of the individual pens. The calf will continue to drink 5 litres of whole milk per day, the calf will also receive an electrolyte in the middle of the day and at night before bed to keep fluids in the calf. Once the calf is back to full health and Kieran is happy with the recovery the calf will then return to the batch.

Colostrum management

Each calf receives 3litres of colostrum within 2 hours of birth on the McDermott farm. The calf will then continue to receive its mother's milk for the next 2-3 days. Once 2-3 days have past the calf then receives milk from a milk pool.





Farmer Focus (Continued)

Hygiene and the Calf House

There is a massive emphasis on hygiene around the calf on the McDermott farm. Once a calf is born on the McDermott farm they are placed in an individual pen. From here the calf can be fed individually and then trained onto a teat feeder without having to compete against older calves. Once the calf has been fully trained the young calf joins the rest of the calves in a batch pen. This gives the calf a great start to its life and gives the McDermotts piece of mind that each calf is getting utmost care on farm.

There is a footbath which is used by both Kieran and Jim on entering the calf house. There are strictly no visitors allowed inside the calf house. If somebody calls to the yard to buy calves Kieran and Jim will have the calves for sale separated out of the main shed, these calves are moved to a pen at the top of the yard for the buyer to view.

Bedding:

The calves receive fresh straw bedding twice a day if needed so the calf bed is always fresh and clean. If Kieran finds the straw getting anyway damp in the shed, it will be cleaned out and limed and then fresh bedding will be applied.

Ventilation:

On entering the calf house, the first thing you notice is the freshness in the air. There is Yorkshire boarding on both sides of the shed allowing plenty of fresh air to pass through.



To make sure calves do not get too cold each calf gets a calf jacket. This always keeps the calf warm. There are also two large doors to the front of the shed which can be opened for extra ventilation on days where the shed may be getting too warm.

Dampness:

There is a fall of 1:20 in the shed pulling any dampness from the calves toward a flow channel which has a 6-inch fall to the front of the shed ensuring each calf is always dry.

Weaning:

Calves must be eating a minimum of 2kg of pellets before they are weaned on farm. Calves must also be 10 weeks of age and weighing no less than 90-100kg.



Management of Calf Scour

Causes of calf scour

When it comes to calf scour, several infectious agents can be involved:

	Cause of calf scour	Age at which clinical signs appear
Parasites	Cryptosporidium	1st week of life
	Coccidia	3-6 weeks of age
Viruses	Rotavirus	1-3 weeks of age
	Coronavirus	1-3 weeks of age
Bacteria	Salmonella	2-6 weeks of age
	E. coli	Calves <5 days of age

Symptoms of scour

- 1 Bright yellow or white faeces.
- 2 Depressed calves that are reluctant to feed.
- 3 Calves with sunken eyes and/or a temperature.
- 4 Skin remaining peaked or tented when lifted, indicating dehydration.
- 5 Weight loss and weakness.
- 6 In severe cases, calves will collapse, become comatose and die.



Diagnosis

It's important to get a diagnosis, especially in an outbreak, as you cannot tell the cause of the scour by how it looks. Speak to your veterinary practitioner, there are rapid test kits for faecal samples available for immediate diagnosis.



Treatment of scour

- 1 Scouring calves should be isolated in a clean, warm and dry pen.
- 2 Calves must receive sufficient liquids and electrolytes to replace those that have been lost. Healthy calves need up to 4 litres of fluid per day and scouring calves need an additional 4 litres to replace fluids lost.
- 3 Continue to offer scouring calves normal amounts of milk. If milk is withdrawn the calf will quickly lose weight and can die from starvation.
- 4 Antibiotics should be administered by injection only when the calf looks very sick or has a temperature outside of 38.5 to 39.5 degrees C. Antibiotics do not work against the parasites and viruses which are the most common causes of calf scour. Therefore it makes no sense to treat with antibiotics.

Prevention

To attempt to prevent scour you must feed colostrum properly to each individual calf. The higher the quality of the colostrum the better the chance the calf will have. It's also vital to introduce and maintain dry clean housing.

Whether a calf stays healthy or gets scour is determined by the balance between the resistance of the calf and the level of infections it's exposed to.

Even if you have excellent colostrum management, good hygiene is still very critical. Keeping the calf warm, clean and dry is important through every stage of calf rearing.



Joint Development Programme

Lakeland Dairies/Teagasc Joint Development Programme has produced this Spring Management Series. Our advisors are currently available by phone to discuss all farm related matters.

▶ Susan Casey 087 099 5359 ▶ Owen McPartland 087 330 2254 ▶ Michael Monahan 087 188 3803