

Animal Health & Milk Quality

Edition 2

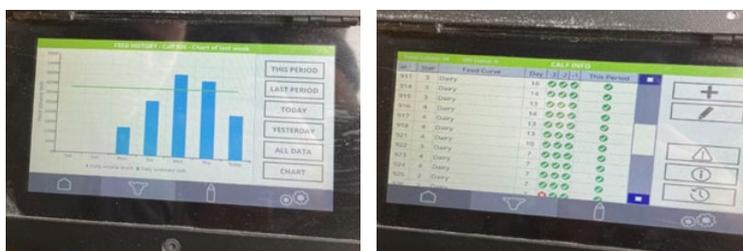
Spring Management Series 2025



Farmer Focus



Eoin and Joe Lenehan
Bolies, Duleek, Co. Meath



Automatic Calf Feeder

Eoin has recently installed an automatic calf feeder on the farm. With the calf feeder he can pick up any early signs of sickness that there might be with a calf by viewing its daily milk intake. The calf feeder manages transition periods for the calf extremely well. Intakes will increase gradually for the calf when switched over to the feeder and decrease gradually at weaning. This reduces stress on the calf.

Farm Profile

Cow Nos.: 100

Calving start date: 22nd January

Turnout date: 1st February

Managing a sick calf

On the Lenehan farm there is a massive effort put into the calves, and as a result there are very few sick calves on farm. If a calf does happen to take sick, Eoin will isolate it immediately from the main group. The calf will be moved into an individual pen in a separate shed. Eoin will put a jacket on the calf and administer appropriate medication depending on the condition. The calf will be monitored for several days and when Eoin is happy with the calf's recovery he will return the calf to the main batch.

Colostrum management



Each calf receives 3 litres of colostrum within 2 hours of birth. Eoin will try to get the calf to suck a hand teat feeder first and if it fails to suck he will then use a stomach tube to feed the calf. Eoin stores colostrum both in a fridge and freezer in a shed on farm. The colostrum is dated and the cow's tag number written on the carton before storage. This is a fantastic way to ensure Eoin has access to colostrum at any time, and it is crucial as not all fresh cows will let down enough milk to feed the calf when first milked. The calf will then continue to receive its mother's milk for the next 3 days. Once 3 days have past the calf then receives milk from a milk pool. At day 5 the calf is then transitioned onto an automatic calf feeder.



Hygiene and The Calf House

There is a massive emphasis on hygiene around the calf on the Lenehan farm. Once a calf is born on farm they are placed in a large batch pen. The calves receive fresh straw bedding twice a day if needed, so the calf bed is always fresh and clean. All straw is stored within the calf house so there is always easy access to straw, it does not have to be loaded across a yard.

The calves also always have access to fresh water with drinkers installed in each calf pen. They also have access to fresh straw from a feeder hanging in the shed. Fresh meal is also always offered to the calves.



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

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.