



By Olivia Hickman

Colostrum

2022

Welcome to the next issue of Calf Link 2022.

Colostrum plays a pivotal role in successful calf rearing, in this issue we are discussing how to manage colostrum to achieve optimal results.



The 4 Q's for Colostrum Management



- **Quality:** Collect Colostrum within 12 hours of birth. You can use a *Brix refractometer* to assess antibody concentration, the **ideal is >22%**. **Keep the best for the new born calves.**
- **Quickly:** Feed calves as soon as possible after birth. Ideally within **6-12 hours**.
- **Quantity:** 10% of bodyweight needs to be fed - **ideally 4L**.
- **sQueaky clean:** Collect colostrum in clean containers that have lids to help reduce bacterial contamination. Don't pool colostrum from different cows.

Bring your refractometer in and we can show you how to calibrate it. You will need DISTILLED water.



Excellent hygiene practices are essential to maintain colostrum quality and minimise bacterial growth.

Bacteria bind to antibodies and interfere with antibody absorption in the calf's gut. This may lead to lower immunity in these calves. Bacteria present in colostrum can also cause disease. Each farm system is different but even if you can only improve/change one thing it can make a big difference to your calves. Here are some suggestions

- Clean, remove excess muck from the teats of colostrum cows.
- Do not use colostrum from sick cows or cows suspected to have Johne's, Salmonella or M.bovis
- Discard colostrum that has been contaminated with faeces/urine. Use buckets with lids to avoid contamination
- Do not pool colostrum from different cows
- Ideally, colostrum needs to be refrigerated, however this can also be achieved on farm by storing it in a cool room (not the hot water cylinder room). Colostrum can be preserved with additives. Ask us at Clutha Vets.
- All containers/ teats/ buckets need to be cleaned with detergent and hot water between collections/feedings.

HOW GOOD IS YOUR COLOSTRUM?

Factors affecting the quality of colostrum

- **Length of dry period:** Dry period <5weeks will decrease colostrum quality.
- **Delay in first milking after calving:** quality declines rapidly after calving
- **Volume of colostrum at 1st milking:** High volumes (>8.5L) can mean lower quality due to dilution. ALWAYS test colostrum.
- **Vaccination of dam:** Vaccinating cows 3-6 weeks before calving will boost protein levels AND specific antibody levels.
- **Age of dam:** Older cows may have been exposed to more pathogens so could have better antibody levels than younger cows—but this is not exact. Vaccination will affect this hugely. ALWAYS test.
- **Breed:** Jerseys tend to produce better quality colostrum because they produce lower volumes.
- **Mastitis/High SCC/blood:** There is no evidence to say non-antibiotic mastitis milk is bad for calves, so this may be fed if needed. Blood is ok too so long as it looks like a strawberry milkshake. Red wine looking milk is not suitable for calves!