



Northwest Veterinary Associates, Inc.

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Calves: When is a Draft Not a Draft?

Take Home Messages:

- Draft: unwanted local cooling of the calf caused by air movement.
- Drafty environments stress calves increasing the risk of illness.
- Draftiness increases as air speed goes up, air temperature goes down, or both
- We can manage calf housing to reduce drafts.

What is a “draft”?

Unwanted local cooling of a calf typically takes place when either the air around the calf is moving too rapidly or the air temperature is too low or both of these conditions. On one hand, during hot summer conditions calves are not stressed when we have big fans moving warm air rapidly through their barn. On the other hand, during cold winter conditions calves can easily experience stress when housing does not block chilly air even when air speed is relatively low.

Managing facilities to reduce drafts: hutches

When do we need to be concerned about “cold” air movement? As a simple rule of thumb, if you need to wear a sweatshirt to do calf chores at your hutches then the air is cold enough to create undesirable chilling of calves. Although, raising the rear of calf hutches is good practice for summer, it is not so good for cold conditions. In the fall, remember to get these hutches back on the ground for cold weather. Likewise, calf hutch vents on the rear/top of hutches need to be closed for cold weather.

Bedding is another important tool to reduce draft and keep calves warm. A good cold-weather bedding material is clean, dry straw. How much is enough bedding? When the calf lies down we should not be able to see her feet. This “nesting” effect helps reduce the speed of air movement around the calf – reducing drafts. For very young calves or ones that do not seem to be smart enough to stay inside the hutch during the night-time hours, also consider blocking the front door opening. This can be done by using a small square bale, or by purchasing a calf hutch door from your particular hutch company.

Managing facilities to reduce drafts: barns

In barns we often have thermometers – so watch yours and when it consistently is below 50F begin your “draft” watch. If your naturally-ventilated barn has curtain-type sidewalls this is the time of year

to begin more intensive management of these curtains. Research monitoring interior temperature changes and air exchange suggests that curtains may need to be adjusted up to seven times a day in order to achieve optimum air exchange without excessive air velocities. Clearly, that frequency depends partly on the outdoor wind speeds and directions.

The calf care person's judgment is very important in naturally ventilated curtain-sided barns. We have to remember that the significant air movement is at the level of a calf lying down in a pen – not standing in the middle of the work alley. Calf pens near doors or ends of a barn may need extra barriers to prevent excessively rapid air movement. If positive-pressure ventilation tubes are added it is important that the tube placement and location and size of holes in the tubes be designed to provide adequate but not excessive air exchange.

In addition to these measures, there are other factors and tools critical to manage calves to reduce the effect of drafts, including:

1. Feeding plenty of high quality clean colostrum as soon as possible after birth.
2. Feeding plenty of clean milk/milk replacer to support at least 1 lb. /day growth even in cold weather.
3. Be sure calf hair coats are clean and dry – especially on youngest calves.
4. Put calf blankets on at least the younger calves most vulnerable to drafts.

Prepared by Dr. Allison Maslack, adapted from Sam Leadley's Calving Ease September 2014

MEETING REMINDER!

Our next Franklin County Dairy Discussion Group Meeting is
Tuesday January 27th at 6:30pm at Alltech, Saint Albans.

Dr. Scott Nordstom, Merck Animal Health Technical Service Veterinarian, will discuss DVMdx.

DVMdx and the Value of a Dead Cow

DVMdx is an internet-based program that was designed with Veterinarians and farmers in mind. When a postmortem (autopsy) is performed a series of pictures can be captured throughout the dissection. These photos, as well as the animal's history, are uploaded onto the DVMdx website creating a case for this animal and farm. Once created, your Veterinarian can access and review the results and make a more informed diagnosis. Additional testing may also be recommended through an affiliated diagnostic laboratory. We hope that utilizing this technology will allow a cost effective and efficient way for you to get more value out of post mortem examinations, both for an individual cow as well as your overall herd health patterns over time. We also hope to train farmers to do their own postmortems.

We hope you can join us!

Complimentary dinner and refreshments provided by Merck Animal Health and Alltech.
Please RSVP by calling or emailing our office.