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Calf Diseases and Prevention; More for Less

Source: Jodi Flaig, Industry Development Coordinator

In today's challenging dairy production environment there can be a feeling that you are doing too much for too little. More safety, more biosecurity, more protocols, more paper all the while the financial benefits are often not immediate or easily definable. What if you could positively impact the transmission of ten calthood diseases by implementing just one new management strategy? The same on-farm management practices used to mitigate Johne's Disease (JD) also apply to: E. coli, Cryptosporidia sp., Rotavirus, Coronavirus, Salmonella sp., BVD, Coccidiosis, Campylobacter and Clostridium. Transmission of these ten diseases could result in impaired calf growth, decreased milk production due to chronic illness as a calf, increased veterinary costs, and increased mortality.

Of primary importance in disease prevention is protecting calves from infection and reducing the pathogen load in the environment. As these diseases are all spread through the fecal-oral route manure management plays a large role. Several practices you could implement are:

Provide clean water and feed - using the same equipment to handle feed and manure, without intervention, can contaminate feed with manure.

Reduce exposure to sick cows and calves- these animals will be shedding the pathogens at an increased rate in their manure.

Minimize overcrowding - cows in close proximity are more likely to have manure on their udders and legs, which will be transferred to a suckling calf.

Keep manure from mature animals separate from young stock - dirty bedding, manure spread on pastures used for grazing in the same year and manure flow within housing may all increase the manure exposure to calves.

One of the tools available to Alberta dairy producers to assess disease transmission risks is the Johne's Disease Risk Assessment (JDRA). When completing a JDRA you work with your herd veterinarian to evaluate your facilities for risk in the above mentioned areas. As a manager, you can then use the assessment to assist in developing and implementing best management practices (BMPs) specific to your farm. Success in implementing BMPs can be increased by limiting them to one or two and making them specific, realistic and attainable. Following up with an annual JDRA is a good way to monitor the success of your BMPs. Should they not be meeting your goals, re-evaluate them.

The health and management of replacement animals are important components of total herd profitability and in adopting BMPs from the JDRA for a whole health approach you may be able to achieve more for less. For more information on the JDRA, please contact Jodi Flaig at 780-577-3307 or jflaig@albertamilk.com.



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