



As I write this article, May is only a week away, and there is still snow on the ground with the threat of another 3-6" tomorrow. It has been a tough spring for newborn calves in eastern South Dakota. Ninety percent of the calves that we have been IV'ing have been cold calves that have either had none or very little quality colostrum. This weather has taken its toll, both on the cows and the calves (not to mention the cattle owners).

Veterinarians are not immune from problems either; one of the "surprise" spring snowstorms left a newborn Dexter chilled 20 degrees low and on the brink of death at our place, but thankfully heat and warm colostrum saved it. It was a necessary reminder, for my wife and I, that there really is no reason for us to calve in April. Like all Dexter owners, we are not "competing" with the traditional cattle market and half of our cows calve in May and June anyways. I would highly recommend to any Dexter owner that deals with adverse spring weather, consider waiting to turn your bull(s) out with your cows until August 1<sup>st</sup> and avoid the headaches of calving in the slop and cold. It is much more satisfying to see cows calve out on grass, knowing that their chance of hypothermia and scours is dramatically decreased. In addition, they are much more likely to get up and nurse that much needed colostrum that helps them get a good start to life on the hoof.

Good quality colostrum is vital for a newborn calf as it gives them passive immunity while their own immune system continues to develop. In order to insure quality colostrum is available for the calf, be sure to have last year's calf weaned from the cow at least 2 months prior to her next calf's arrival. The same would go for anyone who milks their Dexter(s). This allows for her udder to "rest" and prepare the colostrum for the next calf. If the cow or heifer is inadvertently nursed or milked just prior to her next calving, it would be wise to buy some colostrum supplement or replacer to aid in getting quality antibodies into the calf. There are some great products out there that are either blood-derived or made from Johnes-free colostrum (Be sure to verify the source of the supplement/replacer before you buy).

The beauty of the cow's colostrum is that it contains antibodies to pathogens that are prevalent on your particular ranch, which ideally gives the calf good temporary protection. The calf should get 1 quart of colostrum by 6 hours of age, and a total of 2 quarts by 12 hours of age. The reason is that the calf's intestines are "open" to absorb the large colostral antibodies for the first 6-12 hours of life, but will gradually close as time goes on. In light of that fact, it is important to verify that the cow's teats are clean and not covered in a muddy/manure mix. The colostrum needs to "beat" the pathogens to the gut in order to be effective at preventing disease. Cold calves should be warmed up first before attempting to feed them. A newborn calf temperature should be between 101 and 102 degrees F. Getting the calf up, off the cold ground with a couple heat lamps will usually be enough to warm up a chilled calf, but if severe hypothermia is setting in a warm IV may be needed. Once the calf is warmed up to at least 101 degrees, attempt to either put it back on the cow or feed by bottle. Most people don't enjoy "tubing" calves with esophageal calf feeders, but if that is the only option to get colostrum into a calf, it must be done. I would suggest being trained by your veterinarian or someone who has done it before to ensure that it passes into the esophagus and not the trachea. Once you get the previously chilled calf nursing its dam, you should be good to go. Hopefully, this article finds us all in warmer, sunnier weather with calves running around with their tails in the air. Happy calving season!