Neonatal Calf Survival

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Introduction
Enhancing the survival of newborn calves should be a primary goal of all beef and dairy operations. For cow/calf operations, the number of live weaned calves sold is a primary determinant of income. For most dairy operations, calves represent the next generation of milk producing animals. However, keeping young calves healthy and growing is a complex task. Newborn calves, like all newborn animals, face numerous different challenges to their health and survival, including surviving the birthing process, acquiring colostrum, and defending against infectious disease. National surveys demonstrate that in both beef and dairy operations it is common for five to 10% of live born calves to die before weaning.

Because of the importance of newborn calf health to cattle producers, and because of the many challenges that need to be overcome in this area, ILM has focused numerous projects on neonatal calf health issues. As in other project areas we strive to integrate our educational and research efforts to provide better information to veterinarians and producers who work to improve calf health.

Educational projects
We have focused considerable effort on education for producers and livestock workers. These have included seminars and presentations to producer groups and veterinary practice groups within Colorado and neighboring states. Historically, we focused most of our efforts on beef cattle producers, but over the last five years it has become apparent that calf problems in the dairy industry need as much attention as in the beef industry.

In our Livestock Worker Training Program, the module that teaches appropriate management of cows with dystocia to enhance the survival of baby calves has helped many producers improve their success in calf delivery.

We have provided a Manual on Dairy Dystocia Management to instruct the dairy workers on how to manage dystocia in dairy cows to decrease negative impacts on both cows and newborn calves.

We have collaborated with the Integrated Resource Management, IRM on a Caving Management Manual to assist cattle producers on better management to avoid calf death and decreases loss. Chapter 6 on Calving and Handling Calving Difficulties is provided on a PDF for your viewing. If you are interested in the 8 Chapter Calving Management Manual please contact; Dr. Bob Mortimer or Dr. Jack Whittier.

Completed Studies
Current Research Focus
Dystocia in the dairy industry is a very significant problem both because it is a frequent occurrence and because it has profound negative impacts on newborn dairy calves. We have recently completed a study of dairy operations in Colorado, to evaluate the effects of dystocia on newborn calf survival. Dystocia not only increases the occurrence of stillbirths, but also decreases calf survival by increasing calf disease problems throughout the first three weeks of life.