THE     CALF'S     FIRST     MILK  
10-05-16  
Fall is a busy time for many farmers/ranchers as they wrap up haying season and begin crop harvest.  Fall calving season is beginning for several cow/calf farmers and many are weaning spring born calves in preparation for marketing.  
  
A little planning for the fall or spring calving season can go a long ways toward improving those calves survival ability, and preventing illnesses.  Just after birth there are several items we need to do to help our calves stay healthy.  Many of these items can/will aid the calves throughout their lives.  The most important item is for calves to consume/drink the cows first milk, known as "colostrum."  
  
New calves are born with an under-developed immune system.  The first milk, colostrum contains antibodies that AIDS the calf to fight off infections.  Ideally we would prefer the calf to consume colostrum within the first two hours of life but especially within the first 12 to 18 hours after birth.  Within the first hours these antibodies can readily be absorbed by the calf's bloodstream, but later it becomes more difficult.  The process is called "passive Immunity" since the calf receives immunity from the cow, rather than the calf generating its own immunity.  
  
If we are unsure the calf has received sufficient quantiles of colostrum, your herd veterinarian can take a blood sample from the calf to determine if it has received or consumed sufficient colostrum.  
  
The first preference is for the calf to receive colostrum from the birthing cow.  Should the cow produce insufficient colostrum, the second choice would be from other cows within the herd as they are exposed to the same infections and environmental conditions.  The third choice maybe from a local dairy or the use of a commercial colostrum replacer or supplement.  Since there is not much we can do following the time those antibodies can be readily absorbed, we must be prepared to assist the calf to receive sufficient nutrition.  
  
Issues that can influence calf health are a difficult birth and the cow producing insufficient quantities of colostrum.  However, with a little "Tender Loving Care -- TLC," we can get the calf off to a good start and keep'em healthy.  
  
The first milk is very important -- so be a good Boy Scout -- "Be Prepared" to assist those fall calving cows and heifers during calving season.  It.   Is difficult to over-state just how important that calf's first milk can be.  Also, consult with your local herd veterinarian.  
  
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