

Veepro dairy management



*Higher milk yield
with healthy calves*

Keeping calves healthy

A healthy calf is the basis for a good dairy cow. Everyone knows this and yet often many things go wrong when rearing calves. All attention paid to a healthy calf is rewarded later: more milk and fewer health problems. Ultimately the difference in milk production between a good and a bad calf may be as much as 1500kg during the first two lactations.

Plenty of attention is necessary immediately after calving. A calf should receive colostrum immediately. If it does not the young animal will not get enough immune globulins, which are essential to build up a good resistance. With colostrum in time the animal is much less susceptible to diseases. Research shows that on more than 60 percent of the farms the calves build up little resistance, due to

insufficient colostrum supply. As a general rule during the first 24 hours the animal should drink 20 percent of its body weight in colostrum. On day two this amount may be reduced to ten percent of body weight. Make sure the quality of the colostrum is good. This is particularly important to optimize the resistance of the bowels. When a cow produces about 8 kg of colostrum the quality is usually good. This

means that the colostrum contains more than 100 gram of immune globulins per liter. A cow that produces a lot of colostrum (sometimes 12 liters) often has an immune globulin content of below 100. The immune globulin level can be read by means of a density meter. (See table 1 and 2 on the next page.)

Pasteurization

The colostrum can be pasteurized (low

pasteurization 60°C for 30 minutes). This kills most pathogens so that the calves are less likely to get diarrhea. It is best to freeze pasteurized colostrum. Frozen colostrum can be thawed out in bottles in warm water (in a bain-marie) and then given to the newborn calf. A strong calf may be fed the colostrum with lower immune globulin content while a weak calf should get the colostrum with the highest value.