

**Moving from Good to Excellent Calf Management**  
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Sam Leadley, Ph.D.  
Attica Veterinary Associates, P.C.  
[www.atticacows.com](http://www.atticacows.com) [sleadley@rochester.rr.com](mailto:sleadley@rochester.rr.com)

**TAKE HOME MESSAGES**

- 1. Calf care starts with dry cow management.**
- 2. Calf disease management must include both prevention and treatment.**
- 3. Calf care does not stop at weaning. Effective transition heifer management keeps heifers health and growing.**

Good management gives good results. If good results are enough for your clients, that is the end of this story.

However, many of dairies have higher aspirations. They want to see even lower mortality rates. They want to treat fewer calves. They want taller heavier calves at weaning.

**Excellent management does not just happen**

Both good and excellent managers know the basics of calf care.

- Consistent care.
- Strong passive immunity through effective vaccination programs and good colostrum management.
- Adequate nutrition.
- Clean, dry and draft-free housing.

So, why is not all management excellent?

Moving from good to excellent management means concentrating attention consistently on the details that have a high potential for profit.

I chose five areas to highlight at this conference for your consideration:

- Dry cow management
- Transition calf management
- Diagnosing and treating calf diseases
- Cost effective use of vaccines to maximize immunity
- Cost effective use of antibiotics to maximize recovery from disease

These may not sound very exciting. Nevertheless, they have the potential to make or break a calf-raising program.

## **Checklist approach to Total Quality Management**

Total Quality Management (TQM) depends, in part, on having measurable objectives by which quality output is evaluated. The checklists that tie to the five areas above attempt to summarize critical objectives in each area. They are written for on-farm use with producers.

While not all in the same format, each checklist provides criteria that define excellent management. Additional checklists are available at [www.atticacows.com](http://www.atticacows.com) in the Calf Facts section (some in Spanish and French).

## **Dry Cow Management**

This fifteen-point checklist deals with issues of housing, feeding space, reproductive management, hoof care, mastitis management and vaccination programs. Two very important items deal with contingency plans for preventing overcrowding. The housing is adequate for most of the year. There is enough bunk space for most of the year.

In my experience, most farms have overcrowding problems for at least one month or more per year. At these peak calving periods both housing and bunk space are inadequate. Excellent management predicts these crisis events.

Preventing overcrowding requires contingency plans. Plans like these decrease metabolic disorders, respiratory illness and mastitis among fresh cows. Avoiding overcrowding increases milk production and improves calf viability as well as improving colostrum quality and quantity.

## **Transition Calf Management**

There are two checklists for this section. One deals exclusively with feeding. The other touches on immune system, nutrition and housing. When using these tools, it is important to stress that transition heifers have special needs:

- Developing immune systems need lots of protein and energy.
- Developing rumens need time to mature enough to supply the heifer's nutritional requirements.
- Developing bones and muscles need lots of protein and energy in the correct proportions to grow tall, lean heifers.
- Restricting pathogen challenges and limiting stresses will allow their immature immune system to maintain good health.

## **Diagnosing and treating calf diseases**

This checklist focuses on the primary illnesses of young heifers: Scours, Pneumonia, Navel infections and External parasites. It is essential that any diagnosis and treatment protocol include:

- The threshold of symptoms that indicate treatment is needed.
- The drug most likely to succeed in treatment.
- The prescribed dose of the drug to achieve minimal inhibitory concentration in the infected tissue.
- The prescribed duration of treatment most likely to restore health and prevent relapses.

Additional outlines are included dealing with preventing pneumonia in young calves, reducing exposure to pathogens and methods to increase resistance to pathogens.

### **Cost effective use of vaccines to maximize immunity**

The outline, "7 Reasons Why Vaccines Fail," outlines the most common causes of vaccine failure. We know that vaccination does not equal immunity. There are many biological causes of this inequality. However, this outline deals primarily with the management breakdowns that also break the connection between vaccination and subsequent immune status.

### **Cost effective use of antibiotics to maximize recovery from disease**

Not every antibiotic treatment is successful in helping a heifer regain her healthy status. Management of antibiotics can make a big difference in how effective an antibiotic works in disease treatment. Small management errors can result in reducing the cost effectiveness of antibiotic use for health care.

### **For Your Information**

- Go to [www.atticacows.com](http://www.atticacows.com) and enter the word "checklist" in the search box. Alternatively, click on "Calf Facts" in the left-hand menu for over one hundred calf checklists, protocols, and resource papers. Some Calf Facts are available in French and Spanish. Estimated gain tables are available for common milk replacers as well.
- Go to [www.calfnotes.com](http://www.calfnotes.com) and enter a word in the search box - such as blankets, scours, coccidiosis, colostrum, or Colostrometer. Alternatively, use one of the subject headings in the left-hand menu for over one hundred resource papers on calf management. All CalfNotes are available in Spanish.
- Go to [www.das.psu.edu/dcn/CALFMGT/](http://www.das.psu.edu/dcn/CALFMGT/) for the Calf Track chore system, papers on colostrum replacers and electrolytes, and resource papers on calf care.
- For general calf management information, you may want to try [www.ansc.purdue.edu/dairy/calves/calfpub.htm](http://www.ansc.purdue.edu/dairy/calves/calfpub.htm) or [www.babcock.cals.wisc.edu/](http://www.babcock.cals.wisc.edu/)