

Calving and Pac-Man – Now is the Time

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Calving time is here or at least approaching. This brings a new focus for producers who turn their attention to the cow pen. The world is busy and there are many issues producers need to deal with, but being involved in worldly affairs is counterproductive if things run amok at home.

Producers tend to search far and wide for the perfect health program, often overlooking the fact that all calves destined to survive are born with the perfect health program. The immune system is nature's way of keeping calves, and all of us, alive. Without a functional immune system, no level of purchased health care will work for the cow herd or for us.

A quick review of the immune system is in order. The immune system is like the Pac-Man computer game of a few years ago. Pac-Man had a strong craving for little dots, gobbling the dots and anything else that might be up for grabs.

This Pac-Man phenomenon is still the best reference point for understanding immunity within living systems. At this time of year, with calves arriving or about to arrive, the impact of healthy, bouncing calves positively reflects on a production unit's bottom line. The calves need to be full of little Pac-Man personalities.

Living animals are designed with one of the best immune systems around. Cows and calves are no different. The cow already has mastered the art of self-defense and has a fully functional immune system. Having run the course and won, she has defeated many bacterial and viral invasions, as well as other miscellaneous attacks by numerous small invaders, which may or may not even have a name.

The calf, on the other hand, has not been exposed to much of anything, hopefully. Occasionally, bad guys attack while the calf still is resting in its mamma, who directs the fight against the bad guys.

For the most part, calves are born with all the

guns to fight off the worldly invasion of microorganisms, but no ammunition. The ammo is in the cow and needs to be transferred by means of the colostrum (first milk) once the calf is born.

Most producers understand the need for the calf to get a good feeding of colostrum quickly. The quality of the colostrum is directly related to what antibodies (Pac-Man) the mother has to put into the colostrum to transfer the ammo (antibodies) to the calf to load up the immune system so the calf can survive.

Without this infusion of antibodies, the calf faces a huge battle for survival and often dies relatively soon after birth. Just as Pac-Man runs around and eats dots, antibodies move throughout a calf's system to chew up the bad guys. This buys the calf some time to get its own immune system going and produce its own antibodies (ammo) to control its destiny.

The bottom line is to keep mother cows healthy, producing good antibodies (Pac-Man) and be assured the cow will download the antibodies to her colostrum for the calf to nurse. Now also is the time to assist the natural bank of antibodies the cow already has stored up by vaccinating the cows with a precalving Scour Guard product to assure a good early defense for scour invasions.

In fact, early on the agenda for this week, the Dickinson Research Extension Center is running the cows through the chute for their annual scour guard shot. No sense taking chances.

May you find all your NAIS-approved ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0290.



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