

# Feeding colostrum in six steps



## 1 Milk your cow directly after birth and inspect the colostrum

- Milk the cow as soon as possible after calving in order to harvest the best quality colostrum.
- Colostrum quality declines the longer it is held in the udder as it becomes more diluted with time.
- Ensure udder cleanliness – an effective teat disinfectant routine should be followed to minimise the transfer of bacteria.
- Wear gloves where possible to avoid contamination from hands.
- Ensure equipment being used to harvest colostrum is clean and sanitised.

## 2 Test quality

- Test the colostrum quality with a refractometer to determine antibody levels.
- Make sure colostrum is clean by ensuring optimal hygiene during milking and collection.
- If Brix value is 22 or higher, feed the colostrum to the calf.
- Test colostrum from all cows.
- Clearly label colostrum samples with date, cow ID number and quality level.
- Quality will decline if colostrum is contaminated with bacteria.

## 3 Supply 4 litres of colostrum within 4 hours

- The recommendation is that all calves receive 4 litres of clean, high antibody colostrum within the 4 hours after birth.
- This should then be followed up by a further 2 litres within 12 hours of birth.
- The efficiency of antibody absorption from colostrum declines rapidly from birth, therefore feeding colostrum as soon as possible is crucial for successful passive transfer.
- Colostrum temperature must be around 38-40°C when fed; this is as close as possible to the calf's body temperature.

## 4 Method of feeding colostrum

- One option is to use a teat bottle to administer the colostrum. The best way to do this is:
  - Stand over the calf and hold its head between your knees. This works particularly well with lively calves.
  - Offer the teat bottle and allow the calf to drink.
  - Use the dosing valve to supply additional air, as this helps the calf to suckle more easily.
- Tube feeding can also be used to ensure the full volume of colostrum is received by the calf.
  - Ensure tube feeding is only completed by fully trained staff members.
  - Ensure equipment is thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and is appropriate for use.
  - Minimise stress to the calf by working quietly, quickly and calmly.

## 5 Freeze remaining colostrum for reserve

- Colostrum must be frozen at a temperature of -18°C and the temperature must be kept constant.
- Place a digital thermometer in your freezer and check the temperature at regular intervals.
- Colostrum is best frozen in containers that are as flat as possible allowing the colostrum to thaw quickly.
- Record the cow ID number and the date the colostrum was collected on the container.
- Frozen colostrum can be kept for up to two years.

## 6 2nd colostrum batch

- Milk the cow again 6-12 hours after birth for a second batch of colostrum.