



# ON FEED

A newsletter of Dakotaland Feeds

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## A Look Behind

Calves are on feed and a fair number are starting to move to feedyards around the area. When it comes to keeping cattle on feed and gaining, there are a lot of moving pieces. One of the most common comments/complaints we hear is that some of the calves in a pen are 'loose' behind and there are runny stools in the pen. There can be a variety of causes and solutions to this issue.

### In a Nutshell:

- \* **Diarrhea in weaned calves has a variety of causes**
- \* **Sorting or incomplete mixing can result in loose calves**
- \* **Water sources can sometimes make calves loose**
- \* **Internal parasites can cause significant intestinal damage**
- \* **Using ionophores/coccistat from day 1 is recommended**
- \* **Coccidiosis is not always the cause of bloody stools**
- \* **Beware of moldy feed sources and feed toxins**

One of the reasons that cattle show some diarrhea can be related to the feed in the bunk. Having alfalfa not mixed thoroughly in the bunk can lead to one or several animals consuming more than their fair share of that forage, resulting in those calves exhibiting some diarrhea. Often, the high protein of alfalfa is blamed, though it may be a combination of feed factors inherent in alfalfa. Reducing or limiting alfalfa can oftentimes help in this scenario.

Another feed related cause can be related to the grain fraction of the ration. Particularly if there is sorting going on, calves can overconsume the grain portion and become loose. This problem can often be fixed by increasing the moisture in the ration, often by increasing silage, which helps hold the ration together and prevent separation. Sometimes starting rations are relatively dry in order to help limit fermented feeds and include adequate roughage. If calves come on feed quickly though, then moving to a wetter ration earlier may help prevent sorting in the bunk. If you see the hay moved to the side and a lot of 'pitting' in the bunks after feeding, that can be an indication of sorting. Even if the bunk is relatively clean at the end of the day, that doesn't necessarily mean that sorting is not occurring.

Depending on the gain you are wanting from your calves, a few somewhat loose stools in the pen are to be expected. When increasing energy in the diet, some of the calves will be slightly loose as you get the calves acclimated to higher energy or higher grain rations. Those loose stools are usually an indicator that the calves are close to where you want them to be, so long as it is not a majority of the pen and the calves that are loose are not also exhibiting signs of sickness. Loose stools that are brown are not a major concern. Stools that are gray and foamy indicate acidosis and is a problem.

Water can be another reason that calves can be loose. With transitioning from one water source to the next, the sulfates and TDS can be significantly different, which can also lead to calves being loose. It may take a week or two in order for the calves to acclimate to a new water source. Water sources typically don't change drastically from year to year, but it is a good thing to check every water source at least once every 5-10 years to help identify any potential issues. We are used to dealing with high sulfate water, which doesn't necessitate a lot of ration or feeding changes, but we take sulfates into consideration when balancing your ration. There isn't much you can do about the results of the water analysis but if the water isn't suitable for livestock, you will likely see a huge difference in investing in a higher quality water source. If you don't have adequate water intake, feed intake will lag also and that shows up in your ADG and your bottom line. A variety of labs have a livestock suitability water test if you have questions on your water. If you have a rural water system source for your livestock, those sources are checked annually and posted for users.

## A LOOK BEHIND

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Another cause of diarrhea in calves is internal parasites. These internal parasites (worms) can cause substantial damage to the intestine of the calves and basically destroy their ability to absorb nutrients resulting in extremely loose stools. Treating cattle as they come off pasture is the best time to de-worm the cattle because you can kill the worms and the cattle will not be re-infested in a drylot feeding situation. Parasite resistance to our current de-worming products is an increasing problem for cattle and cattle producers. Rotating the class of compound used to deworm can help kill a broader spectrum of worms than sticking with a single product. Rotating class of compound does not mean using the injectable instead of the pour-on. It means switching from an ivermectin product to a white de-wormer which is given orally or in feed. The injectable or pour-on products are good products as are the white de-wormers, but each has its strength and using one in the spring or at pre-conditioning and the other at re-vaccination or weaning time can give you the best of both worlds. Remember too that generics may have the same active compound as the name-brand product, but often the carriers or inactive ingredients help deliver that active compound to the worms and that makes a big difference in efficacy. A talk with your veterinarian is key to helping fine-tune your deworming protocol.

Coccidiosis is another parasite that is associated with diarrhea in calves. Most often, the tell-tale sign of coccidiosis is bloody manure. In those cases, a veterinarian can evaluate the manure by doing what is called a fecal float to determine the presence of coccidia. In stressed calves without a history of being on an ionophore like Bovatec or Rumensin, or a coccidiostat like Deccox, calves may break with coccidiosis after arrival at your feedyard because they were infected with coccidia prior to arrival. Getting a product like Bovatec, Rumensin, or Deccox in your feed from day one on the yard will help prevent coccidiosis from becoming a problem.

Bloody stools without the presence of cocci is an incredibly frustrating issue. It has led to repeated treatment for coccidiosis without any improvement. In the absence of cocci, other causes of bloody stools could include viral pathogens or feed toxins. Viral diarrhea with bloody stools will often just have to run its course because antibiotics and cocci treatments will not help. Feed toxins most often come from moldy feeds and so those feeds need to be evaluated if your calves have bloody stools without cocci. The crop this year had a wide variety of challenges and so it seems that toxins are showing up more often than normal. If the blood in the stool is bright red, it is often an indicator that it is something **other than cocci**. Blood in the stools due to cocci is often partially digested and much darker/black in color. Feed toxins can cause irritation in large intestine or rectum, leading to oxygenated/bright red blood in the stools.

We all want feeding and backgrounding calves to go off without a hitch, but reality is that things happen. Each feeding situation is different and potential causes of issues are different. A talk with your feed consultant and your veterinarian can help determine what course of action is best for your situation. We all need to be on the same team for you to get the best results. Keep everyone on your 'team' in the loop!

*Roxanne Knock, PhD*

*Sincere thanks for your business this past year! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!*

### **Things to be thinking about:**

- \*\* **Remember to HEAT TAPE lines on liquid systems**- this keeps the line fluid. C&R Supply has videos on how to maintain the John Blue pumps at <http://www.crsupply.com/index.php/products/liquid-feed/>
- \* Administer booster vaccinations and implant your calves
- \* Pregnancy check cows and cull opens or problem cows
- \* Use a 5-day pulse of Aureomycin® at 1g/100 lbs of bodyweight in your calves to prevent respiratory disease
- \* Get **30-13 tubs and salt** for grazing corn stalks
- \* Inventory your projected feed resources and project your winter feed needs so you can plan accordingly