

They're under starters orders...

Colostrum products offer all the benefits, without the risks

We look at just a few of the new products that have been launched as an alternative to fresh, frozen, or 'pooled' colostrum, which can sometimes pose the risk of serious disease being passed from cow to calf. All are designed to get calves off to the best start.

With an increase in awareness among producers about the devastating effects of Johne's disease, and the manner in which it can be spread from cow to calf, it's no surprise that more producers are, finally, taking on board vets' advice and moving away from the practice of pooling colostrum. But feeding calves enough 'disease-free' colostrum as soon as possible after birth – ideally within six hours – is also vital to protect the calf from other serious diseases, so what are the alternatives if fresh, or frozen, 'clean' colostrum is not readily available?

And what if the colostrum is not rich enough in those all-important immunoglobulins? The quality of colostrum from high yielding cows and heifers is not always 'up to the job'. So many dilemmas, but there are several

Heat treatment improves health

Another option is to pasteurise colostrum to kill disease, while at the same time maintaining antibody levels. This year's Dairy Event saw the launch of a range of calf milk pasteurisers. The DairyTech machines carefully heat treat colostrum and waste milk to kill disease pathogens.

"And they provide a wholesome and natural food for the calf," according to the US-based company's Wyman Nielson. "Pasteurisation can be used to control certain diseases and to improve the general health of calves."

"Research has shown that feeding milk treated through the batch pasteurisers improves general calf health and

solutions on the market that producers can choose from that all promise to get the calf off to a good start, while at the same time offering sufficient protection from disease.

One such product is Colostry, which claims to be the only complementary feed for calves available in the UK made from only bovine colostrum – some colostrum products can contain as little as 1% colostrum, according to the manufacturer.

This product is made in Canada and, since its launch at the Dairy Event, is now available to producers through their veterinary practice or from the on-line pharmacy at www.farmacy.co.uk.

The higher the concentration of antibodies, known as immunoglobulin G (IgGs), in colostrum, the more likely the calf is to receive sufficient of these

growth rates, even compared to calf milk replacers," says UK distributor Graham Shepherd of G Shepherd Animal Health.

"And the good news is that the pasteurisation process does not significantly damage colostrum antibodies. In fact, antibody levels in calves have been shown to be higher in calves fed pasteurised colostrum, possibly due to less bacteria blocking absorption from the gut."

He adds that pasteurisation reduces the spread of infections from cow to calf and is particularly useful in herds at risk of diseases such as Johne's and Salmonella.

valuable goodies. And this in turn increases the chance of calf survival.

Studies in the US and experiences of some producers already feeding the product in the UK have shown that Colostry-fed calves have demonstrated serum IgG levels well in excess of the recommended minimum 10g/l. In a UK trial, levels of serum IgG averaged over 28g/l.

The colostrum product is screened for a number of bovine diseases, so it can also be used as part of disease control and eradication programmes, such as for Johne's disease.

But crucially, as with the other colostrum products available on the market, this product allows producers to ensure that calves receive the right amount of quality colostrum, at the right time, while extra labour is not needed to manage the process.

Colostrum management

"Colostrum management is often overlooked on busy dairy units and any chance to make the process simpler, yet more effective, by feeding colostrum of a known quality must be good news," says Westpoint Animal Supplies' vet Matt Dobbs.

Another similar product, also recently launched in the UK, comes from North America. Calf Choice Total, which is billed as North America's best selling colostrum product, is manufactured by the Saskatchewan Colostrum Company and is available in the UK from Alta Genetics and through web-based company Farmer to Farmer.

Again, it's made from natural bovine colostrum, which has been tested to ensure that it has a consistently high level of immunoglobulins for calf immunity.

"Research indicates that it achieves higher immunoglobulin levels than other products on the market, as well as some maternal colostrum – particularly that collected from high yielding first- and second-calved Holsteins,"



Healthy heifers: feeding colostrum to calves is vital to protect them from disease

says Farmer-to-Farmer's Alison Loftus. The product is also guaranteed to be Johne's free and Miss Loftus says that there's no need to vaccinate for Roto virus or Corona virus where the product is fed. It also contains antibodies to fight all common causes of scours and pneumonia including Cryptosporidium, E coli, BVDV, BHV-1, BRSV and PI-3 Virus. Calf Choice Total is quick and simple to

use – making it ideal for use after late night calvings. It's less time consuming than collecting fresh, or thawing frozen, maternal colostrum. "Simply mix one sachet with hot water and feed as soon as possible after birth – rest assured that the job has been done at the optimal time."

No risk

Volac's Calf Volostrum is yet another natural alternative to colostrum. Controlled trial findings at the Royal Veterinary College confirmed that this product is a highly effective alternative to cow colostrum. The trial involved dividing 150 calves into three equal groups. The first group suckled colostrum for up to 24 hours after birth; the second group was fed both colostrum and Volostrum; and the third group of calves were fed Volostrum only.

"The results showed that the calves fed solely Volostrum were as healthy and

viable as the calves in the other two groups," explains the company's Sophie Gale. "Indeed, weight gains to six weeks were better than for calves fed colostrum only, indicating that the product supplied complete protection and energy."

So, with such a plethora of colostrum products on the market there's simply no excuse for pooling colostrum and risking the spread of disease.

And there's no reason why all calves shouldn't receive the required amount of good quality colostrum within six hours of birth, regardless of the quality of their dam's colostrum.

And the benefits, in terms of both calf health and performance, far out weigh the additional cost of such products. So there's plenty of reasons to take a closer look at when and how colostrum is fed on your unit to ensure that your calves are getting off to the very best start.

Rachael Porter

Examples of colostrum products

