

We round up some of the latest calf rearing products, research and advice

# What's new in calf rearing?

Read on and see if a livestock surveillance system, advice on preventing scours, or a yeast culture feed additive could help to make looking after tomorrow's milkers as problem-free and successful as possible on your unit this coming winter.

text **Rachael Porter**

**K**eeping a close eye on youngstock couldn't be easier this winter, since Dairy Spares has launched the award-winning cowCam Lite. It's a video-camera system from which images can be relayed to the farm computer and from there, via the Internet, to a mobile phone screen, by subscribing to cowCam Online.

The company says that this is ideal for producers wanting to check, from afar, on their calving pens, young calves and, indeed, all stock. It's also useful for security purposes.

The video camera itself is robust, has 10 metres of night vision, a wide angle lens and a microphone.

It costs £217.50 (plus VAT), and needs to be within 50 metres of an Internet connection. For situations where the internet connection is further away, perhaps in the house, then the original cowCam will be required.

This has a range of 800m and costs £426.10 (plus VAT).

Using either system, a subscription to cowCam Online can then be used to relay the video images to an iPhone or android phone. This costs approximately £90 per year, with the first month included free of charge. Subscriptions are paid for on a month-by-month basis, making the system cost-effective for short-term periods, such as seasonal calving, according to the company.

By subscribing, producers can check their livestock 24 hours a day, from anywhere, so long as their mobile phone has a signal.

## Yeast culture

Adding a yeast culture to calf rations improves appetite and increases growth rates in young calves, according to the results of a study, carried out at Harper Adams University College. Significantly



Simon Marsh: "Yeast increased DLWG"

improved daily live weight gains (DLWG) and feed intakes from birth to weaning affirmed the product's value, while increased rumen girth measurements gave a clear indication that its inclusion was influencing rumen development.

## Scientific evidence

This performance gives credence to widespread positive on-farm findings, which have sometimes been based on anecdote, and a whole body of international scientific evidence.

"We wanted to investigate the effect of feeding XP yeast in both the milk and starter concentrate of dairy-bred bull calves," says Harper Adams' Simon Marsh, who led the trial.

He used a group of 48 Holstein and ContinentalxHolstein bull calves. Half of the animals were fed Rumenco's Diamond V XP, while a control group were fed exactly the same ration without

with Rotavec Corona, 12 to three weeks before calving is a very effective way of reducing scour problems caused by rotavirus, E. coli K99 and coronavirus.

Calves gain protection against these key disease-causing organisms by drinking the antibody-rich colostrum from their vaccinated mothers."

"Scour problems caused by cryptosporidia can also be managed," he said. "Implementing sound hygiene protocols, and the use of Halocur, will definitely help.

"This medication reduces the severity of the disease in individual calves and reduces the output of cryptosporidia oocysts, which cuts the risk of disease spread."

live weight (kg)	control	XP	Sig
start	57.2	57.2	NS
3 weeks	60.1	61.6	NS
weaning	76.1	79.6	NS
12 weeks	122.6	124.8	NS

Table 1: Calf performance (liveweight)

DLWG (kg)	control	XP	Sig
start-3 weeks	0.139	0.205	NS
3 weeks-weaning	0.638	0.721	*
start-weaning	0.410	0.485	*
weaning-12 weeks	1.225	1.189	NS
start-2 weeks	0.779	0.804	P=0.069

Table 2: Daily liveweight gains (DLWG)

rumen girth (cm)	control	XP	Sig
start	92.7	91.9	NS
weaning	107.5	109.8	*
12 weeks	127.1	128.9	P=0.098

Table 3: Rumen girth measurements

the yeast culture. Calves were bucket-fed milk replacer twice-a-day to weaning at 46 days, to which 15g/head/day of XP yeast was added, for the treatment group.

The feed rate was reduced to 10g/head/day on day 28, although this group's early weaning concentrate contained 15kg/tonne of yeast culture. The control group received no XP yeast, but their feed was otherwise identical to the treatment group.

With all calves monitored closely – for their weight gain; girth measurements; feed intakes and, more subjectively, for their coat bloom and faecal score – he says that one finding stood out.

"The daily liveweight gain was significantly greater in the XP yeast-fed group," he says. "The difference was most obvious in the three-week-to-weaning period, but it was also seen all the way from the start until 12 weeks."

Rumen girth measurements showed equally significant differences, which were most pronounced at the time of weaning. This reflected the higher concentrate intakes in the XP yeast-fed calves, which were 4.4kg more per calf by the time of weaning, or 7.9kg more by 12 weeks of age.

"The increased concentrate intake with XP yeast resulted in improved rumen development, which would explain both the increased rumen girth size and the greater DLWG," adds Mr Marsh. |



## Scours – it can be prevented and controlled

The most dominant calf scour pathogens can be controlled, according to a leading animal health company.

The latest published data from the MSD Animal Health ScourCheck scheme reveals that cryptosporidium and rotavirus are the most dominant calf scour-causing organisms on UK cattle units. "The latest diagnostic data from calf-side faecal samples, taken by participating veterinary practices, show more than 32% testing positive for cryptosporidia with more than 29% positive for rotavirus," says MSD Animal Health vet Alfredo Sanz Moreno.

"In the samples submitted, these

two pathogens caused the majority of infectious scour outbreaks on UK calf units, but the good news is that their impact can be controlled

He added that the company's 'save our youngstock' initiative was helping to highlight the costly calf losses caused by these extremely common infectious scour organisms. "In the dairy sector, 15% of heifers die during the rearing period and many of these youngstock losses are down to scour problems or pneumonia.

He stressed that many calf unit scour problems could be overcome with a dam vaccination regime.

"Good cow nutrition and calving hygiene, coupled with vaccination of the dam