



Vet Jon Reader from Synergy Farm Health in Dorset, which is part of the XL Vet Group, takes a timely look at a condition that's all too common in calves when they're housed in the autumn – and throughout the winter. And he offers some pointers on how to control and prevent it.

Faecal sampling is a must to identify the true cause of scours

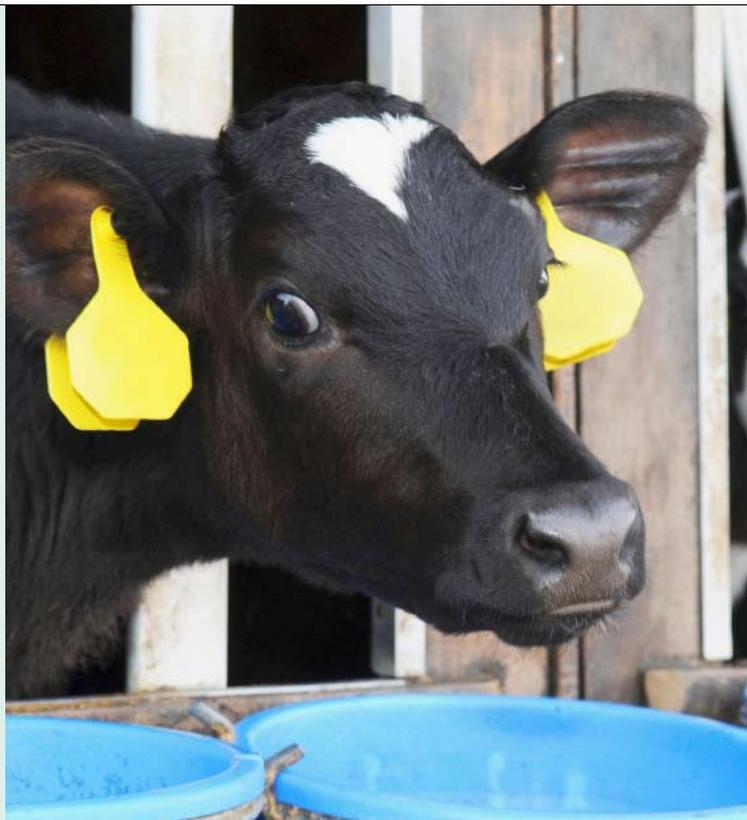
## Follow the three 'Qs'

**A**utumn calving and housing sees the usual annual spike in cases of calf scour and two of the most usual suspects – seen in neonatal calves up until about 10 days old – are Rotavirus and Coronavirus.

Calves will pick these viruses up in their first few days of life from their environment and some won't show clinical signs, but will still shed the virus. So it's important to diagnose the cause of calf scours accurately, via faecal sampling, and, better still, keep calving pens and calf housing as clean as possible.

Making sure that calves are fed enough good quality colostrum immediately after calving will go some way to protecting them, as will following the three 'Qs' – quick, quality and quantity. Vaccinating dry cows, on units where there's a known and significant problem, can boost antibody levels in colostrum and help to reduce the incidence of scour caused by these viruses. But it can prove costly and still requires producer intervention as far as colostrum feeding goes. At least three litres in the first six hours are vital. Remember that pooling colostrum is a no no, due to the possible risk of spreading Johne's disease.

A compromise is to only vaccinate cows three weeks prior to calving during periods of high risk. Cases are more prevalent in the autumn as animals are rehoused for the winter and also as the winter progresses, due to the pressure on housing and the build up of pathogens in the environment.



### The encyclopaedia **Calf scours**

#### **Cause**

Viral causes include Rotavirus and Coronavirus. Another common cause is Cryptosporidium. E. coli and Salmonella can also be to blame. It's vital that producers and vets

work together to find out what is causing calf scour so prevention and treatment strategies can be tailored accordingly.

#### **Symptoms**

Diarrhoea/scouring is the first symptom.

As the condition progresses, calves refuse feeds and be reluctant to drink. In severe cases, calves become dehydrated and collapse, and it can be fatal.

#### **Treatment**

A viral cause means there's no treatment, but supportive therapy must be given while the infection runs its course. Milk should be withdrawn and replaced with electrolyte rehydration therapy. There are also some gel products available that can be given without withdrawing milk feeds to aid rehydration and recovery.

#### **Prevention**

Colostrum and cleanliness are key. At least three litres of good quality colostrum should be given in the first six hours after birth, to provide the calf with antibodies to protect it. Calving pens and calf housing should be cleaned, disinfected and preferably rested between batches.

Cows can be vaccinated three weeks before calving to boost their colostrum antibody levels and help to protect their calves. This costs around £9 per shot and still relies on producers following the three 'Qs'.

