

Lean concept offers calf-rearing benefits

Streamlining calf management – to maximise efficiency and make marginal gains – will be the focus of Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health’s #Calfmatters campaign in 2020. And there are plenty of ways that producers can get involved with the programme – and benefit from the results.

TEXT RACHAEL PORTER

Lean management is something that Boehringer Ingelheim’s vet Matt Yarnall has been intrigued by for a while and he’s looking forward to seeing how it can help to improve and streamline calf rearing on UK units during the next 12 months.

The concept is strongly associated with manufacturing – most notably the car industry. But it has its roots as far back as the late 1800s, when the concept was first developed to improve efficiency in factory/production line environments. This included the standardisation of work and time-and-motion studies, to improve the efficiency of work methods, processes and operations.

More recently the human behavioural aspects of work have been added to this concept – pioneered by the likes of Henry Ford and Japanese car manufacturers, most notably Toyota.

Continuous improvement

Kaizen, which basically translates from the Japanese as continuous improvement, is a part of this Lean management philosophy, and essentially looks at identifying what’s slowing down productivity (delaying colostrum feeding) or preventing something from happening at all (for example, ensuring that calves receive enough quality colostrum in the first six hours of life, at the correct temperature).

With so many variables – and all dairy units and calf rearing systems being unique to these individual herds and set ups – it’s ripe for the lean management treatment.

“Lean management and the kaizen principle of continuous improvement could be applied across the entire dairy herd and business, but calving and calf rearing is a good place to

start,” says Mr Yarnall. “There are some easy wins and gains to be had and producers can start small and add things in as they go along. It’s not a static concept and there’s no one-size-fits-all solution. Even the best calf rearers can continue to hone their systems – or expand their goals.

“It’s all about the detail – not about making huge changes or making significant investment in new kit. It could be something as simple as printing out a calving and colostrum protocol and displaying it clearly. Or marking a space on the floor for a calving/colostrum kit ‘trolley’ to sit so it’s where it needs to be at all times.”

Streamlining systems

Focusing on the period from calving to 10 days of age is a start – a blood test can be carried out at a week of age to check the calf’s immunity or, in other words, the efficacy of colostrum management and early calf care.

“And then producers could take this concept right through to first calving and the heifer joining the milking herd. They can go at their own pace and build a lean management system that suits their herd, system and set up.”

Mr Yarnall says that producers often invest a lot in genetics: “But it’s typically the small, low-cost aspects of calf rearing that can really make a big difference. The devil is in the detail and lean management – streamlining systems – can dig some of this out.”

What order is the best order to do things? How should things be done? What’s the best kit to use? How do you ensure that it’s always clean, ready to use and close at hand? These are all aspects that require thought and planning – to help ensure that things are done quickly, efficiently and well. It may be that some things are not happening at all, or they are happening but too slowly – or not effectively. It’s about questioning every little thing and asking if it can be done quicker or better?

He adds that calf rearing is still the poor relation on a lot of units. “Many still fail to prioritise it. It tends to just ‘fit in’ around day to day management of the milking herd. But it’s time to turn that on its head and have someone on the unit who is ‘invested’ in it so that it becomes their priority and their key job.

“I’d say that’s really the first step towards lean management

Matt Yarnall:
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#Calfmatters 2020

Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health will also be undertaking Kaizen #Calfmatters farm walks in spring 2020, across the UK. [And look out for competitions and other ideas on social media and at \[www.calfmatters.co.uk\]\(http://www.calfmatters.co.uk\)](#)

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when it comes to calving and calf rearing – someone has to step up and take charge. The second stage is to put processes in place and then add ‘standard operating procedures’ to make sure that these protocols happen. Having a list up on the wall of what needs to be done and in the correct order, is one thing. Things also have to be in place – and to hand – to ensure that everything on the list happens in the correct time frame and in the right order.” And just such a list is something that the company hopes to produce, with pointers on how to make sure the processes on the list are carried out quickly, easily and effectively.

Calving-kit trolley

Making sure that things are tangible is also important. “One good idea that I’ve seen on farm – which I’ve also seen in a hospital environment – is a trolley that’s loaded up with all the kit necessary to facilitate calving and colostrum feeding. It’s a way to ensure that everything is to hand and ready to use.”

And to ensure that the trolley is where it should be – and ready to go – he’s seen producers who’ve marked the floor in the prep area with tape, to create a ‘parking space’ for the trolley. “It then has a home – a proper place. And it’s also easy to see that it’s missing.”

The #Calfmatters campaign will be officially launched at DairyTech 2020, on February 5, when Tom Oliphant, British Touring Car Championship driver for Team BMW and West Surrey Racing, will give a presentation on the lean-management concept and a dairy producer will also talk about how aspects of this have made a difference to their calving and calf rearing routine.

“We think this will whet producers’ appetites and capture their imaginations. It’s very much about looking at protocols and improving them. This is often about making them easier to action, rather than changing them,” adds Mr Yarnall. “And who better to ask about what works on farm than the producers themselves. We’ll be running a campaign on social media and asking for producers’ ideas and input.”

Questions will also be asked, such as how best to move calves quickly and easily – with minimal stress to calf and rearer – from the calving pen to calf housing.

“Something as simple as investing in a wheelbarrow that’s designed for the job can really make a difference here. So the next question is which wheelbarrows do producers recommend? What do they find works best and why?”

“Other points for discussion will include colostrum management and feeding – what’s the most efficient way to measure quality, store colostrum, warm and feed it? This is where social media will really come into its own. And where we’re excited to see what direction this takes and how the campaign evolves during 2020.” |