

## Help your calves beat the winter blues!

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As much as we don't want to accept it, winter is just around the corner. As you start preparing your homes and cars (and maybe even your bodies!) for the transition to cold temperatures, may you also consider adjusting your calf management programs to better suit their winter needs. These four tips will help keep your calves healthy and happy during the cold winter months.

- 1) Increase their nutrition – when the temperature drops below the calf's thermoneutral zone (which is between 59 and 77°C), she will experience cold stress. In order to combat cold stress, the calf must consume more nutrients and more energy, otherwise she will have to rely on her body reserves to keep her warm. For your older calves, this shouldn't be a huge challenge – just make sure they have lots of solid feed in front of them. But for your younger calves that still rely on milk replacer or whole milk, making sure they have enough energy to meet their maintenance requirements and can also grow during these cold temperatures is a challenge. The most common strategy for increasing nutrient availability to calves during the winter is to add a third feeding. If you are already feeding three times a day, you can increase the volume of milk you're offering, or switch to a different milk replacer that is higher in energy. For every degree drop below 50°F, energy requirements increase by 1%. Depending on your milk replacer and feeding rate, this can equate to a large additional energy requirement that is often overlooked. Please reach out if you need help calculating calf energy requirements and identifying a feeding program that works well for your herd.
- 2) Calves get cold in the winter, just like us – providing them with a calf jacket is a good way to help keep them warm. Putting a calf jacket on can decrease the calf's heat loss by 15% - which means more energy can be put to growth! Before you put a jacket on a newborn calf, make sure the calf is dried off well so that the jacket doesn't trap in moisture and make her even colder. Lastly, not only is it important to provide the coat, but it is also important that the coats are washed frequently to minimize spread of disease.
- 3) Make sure water doesn't freeze. If you are increasing the amount of milk replacer you are feeding, you will be increasing the overall solids level and this may cause calves to want to drink more water. Providing water is important not just in the summer months when it's warm out, but also in the winter. Staying hydrated is an important part of calf health. Replacing water daily and making sure it stays clean (and not frozen) is a good way to make sure calves are encouraged to drink!
- 4) Make sure bedding is dry and warm. Providing lots of dry bedding will help keep the calves warm so that again, they can focus on growth. A good way to test if the bedding is dry enough is to do the 'kneel test'. If you kneel in the bedding and your knees become damp, that is a good sign that the bedding isn't dry enough for the calves!



Picture taken from progressive dairyman