

Positioning Colostrum Replacers with Beef Producers

The January 2013, beef cow inventories were at a 60 year low, and with this year's drought, cattle numbers in the plains states are expected to be even lower in 2014. A bumper crop this fall has pushed corn prices lower, encouraging higher feeder cattle prices. Feedlot and stocker operators are hungry for numbers and could pay record calf prices in 2014 creating conflict for cow-calf operators. Cow-calf operators will be torn between rebuilding their herd and selling profitable weaned calves. Either way, opportunity is coming in 2014 for you and your producers. Beef calves, whether bulls or heifers, are valued at an all-time high and making sure they are getting adequate colostrum will be key.

When positioning and selling colostrum products, we often target dairy producers and beef producers with orphan beef calves, however, what about the thousands of healthy beef calves born each year to healthy dams – are they getting adequate colostrum? Are they getting colostrum quick enough? What factors might be considered when discussing options for replacing colostrum with beef producers?

How Do Colostrum Replacers Differ?

There are several colostrum replacers available on the market, and the primary differences are globulin protein source and concentration per dose.

- **Globulin protein source** – There are two primary sources of globulin protein in colostrum replacers; 1) dried bovine colostrum derived from maternal colostrum, and 2) dried bovine serum derived from meat processing plants. Both sources have been shown to support adequate absorption and passive transfer of immunity, although there may be some variation among sources (depending on supplier) with regard to apparent efficiency of absorption (AEA) by the calf.
- **Globulin protein concentration** – Among colostrum replacers, globulin protein concentration ranges from 100 to 150 grams per feeding.
- **Proven efficacy** – Suppliers of colostrum replacer should be able to provide research data showing proof of successful passive transfer.

Colostrum Replacers vs. Supplements

Evaluating the differences between replacers and supplements comes down to two main factors – number of globulin proteins provided to the calf and cost.

- Colostrum replacers are defined as providing calves with **at least 100g of globulin protein** per feeding and are typically used when maternal colostrum is not available, consumption is unknown or the quality of the maternal colostrum prevents its use.
- Colostrum supplements typically provide calves with **50 to 75g of globulin protein** per feeding. Supplements are fed in conjunction with maternal colostrum when the maternal colostrum is partially inadequate in some way, either by quantity or quality.

Value is a Must

Value is key for beef producers – the value a colostrum replacer provides must outweigh the cost and perceived hassle of its use! When positioning either a colostrum replacer or a supplement with beef producers, cost can definitely play a factor, especially if purchasing this type of product is not a part of their typical cost of gain evaluation. Consider the following value propositions:

- Position the colostrum product on a cost per gram of globulin protein basis. Beef producers are very familiar with this type of evaluation as input costs are typically calculated on a per pound of gain basis.
- Develop and communicate protocols for use. Whether the product is to be used with calves born to first calf heifers only, particular aged cows that have a track record for not producing good colostrum or whole herd feeding protocols, work with the producer to develop and communicate protocols to farm employees prior to calving season.
- Deliver the facts – although most of the colostrum studies published are on dairy heifer and bull calves, the fundamentals of their benefit can easily be translated to the beef industry:
 - Reduced treatment and mortality rates (NAHMS, Wells, 1996)
 - Improved growth rates and feed efficiency (Fowler, 1999; Faber et al., 2005; Nocek et al., 1984; Robinson et al., 1988; Faber, 2005)
- Provide a colostrum replacer that is easy to use – meaning easy to mix, easy to deliver and easy to clean up.

Take-Home Messages

- Beef calves will be valued at an all-time high in 2014 due to low grain prices and beef cattle shortages.
- Understanding and selling the differences between globulin protein sources and concentrations as well as offering beef producers a colostrum product with a proven track record is key.
- Colostrum replacers and supplements are not created equal and are priced according to the grams of globulin protein per feeding.
- Beef producers will expect value out of product like colostrum replacers.