

# Lifeline Pre-Calver good for cow and calf health at Irish dairy farm

## Providing cows with important minerals, vitamins and trace elements during the dry period is lifting colostrum quality and driving cow and calf health and performance at a County Fermanagh dairy farm

Father and son John and William Rutledge run a herd of 160 Holstein Friesians on the outskirts of Derrylin.

Cows produce an average annual milk yield of 8,500 litres on a twice a day milking system.

The herd calves in a block from September to early March with drying off eight weeks before the due calving date.

At this point Lifeline Pre-Calver buckets are introduced.

Dr Amanda Dunn, of manufacturer, Uniblock, advises that this is the ideal time to introduce these as colostrum formation begins approximately five weeks before calving.

Lifeline Pre-Calver is formulated with the calf and the cow in mind as it contains immune-boosting ingredients that stimulate the cow's immune system during the final weeks of pregnancy, increasing antibody levels in the colostrum, says Dr Dunn.

"Looking after the calf does not start when the calf is born, but with the dry cow," she points out.

Two Lifeline buckets are allocated for every 30 cows at the Rutledges' farm and these are available at all times; two 18kg buckets usually last each group around a fortnight.

"The cows seem to really love the Lifeline Pre-Calver, it is very palatable and there are no issues with getting good intakes," says William.

The Rutledges source the buckets from Ivor Wilson at Wilson Agri Merchants, Teemore, County Fermanagh.

Alongside Lifeline Pre-Calver, cows are fed a total mixed ration of dry cow silage, straw and 1.5kg blend.

William quality tests all colostrum produced in the first milking - Lifeline Pre-Calver is patented to boost colostrum quality by 25%.



Ivor Wilson (Wilson Agri Merchants), Amanda Dunn (Uniblock) and Farmer William Rutledge

"Since introducing Lifeline into the cows' diet, the majority of the colostrum tested is excellent, and this gives great peace of mind that we are giving the calves the best start in life," he says.

Dr Dunn says the importance of good quality colostrum for newborn calves cannot be over-stated.

"Calves are born totally naive of immunity and rely solely on colostrum as a source of passive immunity," she says.

As well as antibodies, colostrum contains an abundance of other bio-active factors, growth hormones, maternal cells and oligosaccharides and has higher levels of fat, protein, vitamins and minerals than standard milk.

All these components play a significant role in developing the calf's immune system, especially its underdeveloped gut.

Without good quality colostrum calves are much more likely to succumb to ill thrift, enteric diseases and mortality in their first few weeks of life.

"Making the most of this 'free' source of nutrition is therefore highly recommended," says Dr Dunn.

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William manually feeds all calves a minimum of 10% of their birthweight in colostrum as soon as possible after calving. As birthweight mostly ranges from 30-40kg this equates to three to four litres of colostrum at that all important first feed.

There are two main reasons for getting good quality colostrum fed quickly, says Dr Dunn.

“Colostrum quality, measured by IgG levels, decreases at the rate of approximately four per cent every hour post-calving, therefore the sooner it is collected from the cow the better quality that colostrum will be,” she says.

Also, the calf has a short window of opportunity to absorb antibodies from colostrum into the bloodstream post-birth - this window disappears when the calf is 24 hours old.

William says his calves are very vigorous. “That’s the main thing, they are keen to suck and tend to thrive very well,” he says.

The minerals in Lifeline Pre-Calver aid the calving process.

Herd fertility is excellent too with cows getting back into calf easily, William reports.

He uses collars to aid heat detection. With more information around breeding activity William can make informed decisions on the optimum time for insemination.

Getting the timing right means higher conception and pregnancy rates, but feeding the correct minerals during the dry period also has a positive influence on cow fertility and health post calving, he says.

Post-calving is the most common period for cows to become

sick because they are at risk of metabolic diseases, in part because they are at their most vulnerable when their immunity is compromised at calving.

If the pregnant cow lacks the necessary minerals and vitamins, there will be an increased risk of post-calving health issues such as retained cleanings, milk fever, ketosis, poor dry matter intakes, poor quality colostrum, displaced abomasum and fertility problems later on, Dr Dunn explains.

“Providing the dry cow with the correct vitamins and minerals is vitally important to the calf as these are then available in the colostrum,” she says.

Since he introduced Lifeline Pre-Calver to the herd diet, the Rutledges have had no issues with milk fever or retained cleanings

“When it comes to trying new products, the cows will soon tell us if those products aren’t doing what it says on the bucket,” says William.

Protected sources of copper and zinc are included in the Lifeline Pre-Calver formulation instead of copper and zinc sulphates or oxides as these protected sources are more bioavailable, palatable and result in better performance, intakes and efficiency.

Lifeline Pre-Calver is also available in bags as a crumb but William’s preference is for buckets as they are convenient and they suited his system.

Overall, he says he is delighted with the calves that are produced from cows fed Lifeline Pre-Calver and with the health of his cows post-calving.

# Zero calf mortalities in beef herd since Lifeline Pre-Calver added to dry cow ration

## A pre-calving mineral given to pregnant cows in the final eight weeks of pregnancy is boosting a pedigree beef herd's colostrum yield and quality – resulting in zero mortalities in 2021.

Titchburn Limousins, a mostly autumn calving herd of 35 pedigree cows, is run by father and son, Donal and Ciaran Murray, in County Armagh.

They source Lifeline Pre-Calver crumb from Fane Valley Store at Altnamackin, Newry.

Donal says calf health is testament to the quality of the mineral.

“With the help of Lifeline Pre-Calver, I didn't lose a single calf last year and I put that down to the calf getting off to the best start possible in the early stages of life.”

The product, manufactured by Uniblock, has been patented for its ability to boost colostrum quality by 25%.

It has now been formulated to include more rumen bypass protein to improve colostrum yield.

The Murrays' calves are vigorous at birth. “Calves get up quickly to suckle their first and important feed of colostrum,” says Donal.

Research has shown calf vigour to be a combination of several factors but nutrition in the final 60 days of gestation and good genetics top the list.

Lifeline Pre-Calver includes lactose, protected rapeseed and a range of yeast products, helping to increase calf vitality and stimulate the cow's immune system - increasing levels of antibodies in colostrum and, as a consequence, boosting colostrum quality and quantity.

Attention to detail is key in the Murrays' system. A refractometer is used to measure colostrum quality as soon as possible after the calf is born.

“I would say that at least 90% of cows produce a high reading when it comes to colostrum quality and also the appearance of the colostrum has been much thicker than in previous years,” says Donal.

A combination of factors play an important role in the health of the newborn calf:

1. Quality of colostrum consumed
2. Volume of colostrum produced by the cow
3. How quickly the calf receives colostrum.



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# Zero calf mortalities in beef herd since Lifeline Pre-Calver added to dry cow ration (cont'd)

Dr Amanda Dunn, of Uniblock, recommends that a calf ideally needs to consume 10% of its bodyweight of good quality colostrum (>22% Brix) within the first few hours after birth.

Donal manually feeds his calves a minimum of three litres of its dam's colostrum where possible promptly after birth, to ensure adequate immunity in the first few weeks.

"Good colostrum management reaps benefits in the calf's health," he says.

If minerals and vitamins are in short supply, the cow is at greater risk of post-calving health problems such as retained cleansings, milk fever, ketosis, poor dry matter intakes, poor quality colostrum, displaced abomasum, and fertility problems.

Metabolic issues are not an issue at Titchburn Limousins.

"Since using Lifeline Pre-Calver not one cow has held her cleansings, most shed theirs within two to three hours after calving. We have no issues with milk fever on the farm either," says Donal.

The dry cow diet consists of top-quality grass silage, straw and Lifeline Pre-Calver as a top dressing on the silage.

"Making good quality silage really makes a difference when it comes to achieving results, we try to cut every five weeks when the weather is right," says Donal.

Another benefit of using a crumb-type pre-calver instead of a powder alternative is that it is bulky in appearance and texture.

"Intakes are better with the crumb as it tends to sit on top of the silage instead of filtering down through," Donal points out.

Good calf performance at the farm is also down to animals getting off to a better start after an easy calving.

Research has shown that with a difficult calving comes greater risk for infectious diseases, such as diarrhoea and respiratory disease, higher mortality rates and it is more challenging for the calf to maintain its body temperature after being born.

About 40-50% of the Murrays' cows calve without their knowledge. "The majority of cows tend to need little assistance, which is easier on both cow and calf," says Donal.

His cows are scanned four weeks after calving to check for any infection left behind in the uterus before breeding.

Infections like metritis and endometritis can be picked up and corrected in the early stages.

"Thankfully we rarely have many 'dirty' cows," Donal says.

"I am also very happy with the cows' performance post-partum.

We observe strong heats and get good results with artificial insemination."

Dr Dunn says that this is again connected to good dry cow management. "Trying to eliminate metabolic diseases around calving sets the cow up for another successful breeding season.

"Protected sources of copper and zinc are now included in the Lifeline formulation instead of copper and zinc sulphates or oxides as these protected sources are more bioavailable, palatable, and result in better performance, intakes and efficiency."

Feeding lifeline mineral crumb at the recommended rate of 200g/cow/day costs approximately £0.25/cow/day.

Donal says it is money well spent. "The benefits gained from using a pre-calving mineral by far outweigh the costs involved."

Lifeline Pre-Calver suits his system, he adds.

"It is very palatable, it produces vigorous, healthy calves, good quality colostrum and plenty of it, helps eliminate common metabolic issues in the cows, we have less difficult calvings and it helps get my cows back in calf post-calving.

"I would most definitely recommend this premium product as it gives me peace of mind that the cows are receiving all the essential minerals and vitamins required at this crucial period for both calf and the cow."

