

Beginning Women's Farming Conference
March 22 & 23, 2012

"Addressing Animal Health Issues" - Handout

Keeping Your Livestock Healthy: *Raising healthy livestock starts with a good prevention management plan, which includes good nutrition, healthy living quarters both indoors and out, observation skills, and tools and resources to have at your fingertips when treatments are needed. This presentation will cover some key preventive strategies, along with some treatment approaches that Lisa McCrory turns to on her farm including homeopathy, colostrum whey products, nutritional therapies, herbs, and books/resources she likes to have at her fingertips on her grass-based, certified organic farm.*

Healthy livestock are a reflection of a whole farm system, involving a number of elements to balance quality of life with commercial livestock production. Preventing dis-ease (illness) on your farm starts from the soil up; building soils with a good balance of biological life, minerals, and organic matter. With healthy soils in place, you can provide high quality feed for your production animals, which is step one in preventative care.

Meeting the nutritional needs of your livestock, however, is only part of the equation. The animals will also need an environment that provides fresh air, clean water, adequate shelter, sunlight, freedom of movement, and pasture to graze or forage.

Water

Good quality and plentiful water is important; it is a significant portion of your animals' daily intake. Making sure that the water is clean and available in quantities necessary to meet the needs of your livestock groups is critical. A dairy cow, for example, consumes from 10 - 25 gallons of water per day depending upon her body size, stage of lactation, and the amount of water in the feed she is consuming (pasture is 70-80% water!). For a beef cow, it is 10-20 gallons, 8-12 gallons for horses, 6-8 gallons for pigs and 2-3 gallons for sheep and goats.

It is best to have water in the paddocks where the animals are grazing to allow them to focus their energy on harvesting forage. A water source located a distance from the pasture may encourage the whole group to leave the pasture and get a drink of water at one time. This group dynamic does a few things that are not considered favorable for a healthy livestock operation: it distracts the animals from eating, keeps some from getting their daily allotment, and results in concentrations of manure left around the water tub (instead of being deposited in the pasture) and soil compaction.

Fresh air, adequate shelter, and access to sunlight & the outdoors

During the months outside of the growing season, your livestock should have daily access to the outdoors, sunlight, fresh air, clean, dry bedding, fresh water and protection from inclement weather. A comfortable animal is a happy animal. Make sure that your ruminants have opportunities to lie down and chew their cud; make sure there is adequate perching space and nesting boxes for your poultry; make sure your pigs have plenty of space to make a clean 'nest' with if she does not have a clean, dry place to do this, with adequate space, then this could put unnecessary stress on the cow.

Know Your Animals

Good observational skills are important for any livestock operation. Taking the time each day to look for signs of health and signs of "dis-ease" is a worthwhile investment. This does not necessarily mean having to know the personality of each and every animal (although some producers do). It is, however, taking note of visible signs of unthriftiness or discomfort. Take note healthy animals too to affirm what is working well, and to identify livestock that you want to use to improve the genetics of your herd or flock.

An animal that is unthrifty may first show changes in attitude. She/he may be nervous or jumpy, depressed, off feed, or his/her water consumption may be down. Maybe she is not chewing her cud. Perhaps she isn't laying down, or is laying down and not wanting to get up. Is she hanging out with the other animals when she is outside, or is she off by herself? How does her manure look and what does her breath smell like?

Signs of good health include a glossy coat, bright eyes, good body condition, good appetite, good milk production, low somatic cell count, alert disposition, and good mobility. The manure should not be too loose and shouldn't have undigested grain in it. You can learn a lot about an animal's health just by watching it in motion. So take the time to watch your animals each day; it may be the best 10 minutes you ever spent.

Fly control and Parasite Management

Flies bring stress and disease and seem to annoy and cluster around our cows the most. We will be trying a new fly trap in our pastures this year, called the Jahnke Fly Trap. Instructions on how to build this trap can be found

here: http://www.nodpa.com/production_healthy_jahnke_flytrap_02_03_11.shtml

And here is a webinar on the trap: <http://www.extension.org/pages/62007/video:-innovations-on-an-organic-dairy:-the-fly-barrel>.

Another great resource is the 'Integrated Pest Management Guide for Organic Dairy': www.nysipm.cornell.edu/organic_guide/dairy.pdf - this information is useful for all livestock producers, educating the reader on the various fly pests, their life cycles, and ways to manage them.

We do not use medicines to manage internal parasites – have never needed it for our cows, pigs or our poultry. We feel that a good rotational grazing system for our livestock, moving them frequently onto fresh ground, will prevent a lot of possible problems. We do look for signs of parasitism so that if we needed to, we would treat with anthelmintics.

Small ruminants have an added vulnerability to parasites. I recommend the following documents (located on the following websites) to read up on preventive strategies for small ruminants:

1) Sustainable Management of Internal Parasites in Ruminants.

www.nofavt.org/assets/pdf/Parasites.pdf

2) Internal parasites in your small ruminants:

www.uvm.edu/~susagctr/Documents/Internalparasites.pdf

Long Term Health Plan and Records

When entering known periods of stress such as calving/kidding/farrowing, drying off, weaning, vaccinations, or significant changes to the feeding ration, it is always good to work preventatively and offer those animals nutritional supplements, probiotics, vitamin therapies, and/or kelp. Preventative measures will pay for themselves many times over when done right.

A long-term health plan should be developed with the help of your veterinarian, your nutritionist, and/or your farmer mentors. As a certified organic operation, we are required to have a record-keeping system. There are benefits to doing this that go beyond accountability to a certification program. Good records allow you to track the health, production, and reproductive history of the livestock, land management, crops harvested, feed purchased, feed additives, and health care inputs, including what is working on you farm and what is not. With experience and records, every producer can gain insight into the relationship between soil health, livestock health, and a productive whole farm system.

Health Products used on Earthwise Farm: when, how and why

On Earthwise Farm and Forest, we make sure to have the following supplied on hand:

- Homeopathic remedies – Homeopathy is our first line of defense when we have an animal with mastitis.
- Probiotics, Yogurt – fed to calves to deal with mild cases of scours
- Calcium supplement (IV and Sub Q) – good to have on hand after calving in case our cows come down with milk fever
- Electrolytes (available in powder or liquid form)– wonderful supplement to offer your livestock during times of stress, such as calving/farrowing/kidding. We like to add small amounts in the water for our day old turkeys and chickens – continuing for at least the first couple weeks of life, and offering it at other times if it seems necessary.
- Lotion/ointment for dry teats or skin abrasions – we make a calendula lotion from our flowers, blended with bees wax and olive oil.
- Peppermint liniment for hard quarters – works great for swollen udders due to edema (at time of calving), or for hard quarters from mastitis
- Kelp – we offer this free choice to our cows and supplement in the poultry and hog ration as needed.
- Minerals, clay minerals, humates, salt – offered free choice to our cows and pigs
- Nutraceuticals and colostrum whey products – we purchase pre-packaged nutritional supplements (boluses, liquid, or pastes) for times of stress such as freshening, drying off, mastitis, calf scours, off-feed, etc.
- Saving and freezing colostrum from the cow – we make sure that our calves get the colostrum from their mother within the first 12 hours after birth. We encourage nursing, but will also milk the cow and bottle-feed the calf. Surplus colostrum is frozen and used as a nutritional supplement during times of stress
- **Supplies: Teat dip** for pre and post milking, **iodine** for dipping navels of newborn animals, **CMT kit** to test milk quality. CMT (California Mastitis Test) can catch subclinical cases of mastitis, looking at individual quarters, and will help us monitor the quality of our milk.

Resources/catalogs for health and dairy supplies:

- Livestock health supplies and nutraceuticals : 1) Crystal Creek, www.crystalcreeknatural.com, Phone: 888-376-6777, 2) Agri-Dynamics, www.agri-dynamics.com, Phone: 877-393-4484, 3) IMPRO Products (colostrum whey), www.improproducts.com

- Homeopathic remedies: Washington Homeopathics: www.homeopathyworks.com, and Celletech Products: www.celletech.com