

Respiratory Illnesses

By Jim Gardiner

Hello Everyone,

My name is Jim Gardiner. My wife, Nancy, and I operate an organic dairy farm in central New York along with our four children. Over the last thirteen years, my wife and I have worked at finding alternatives to medications through the use of vitamins, minerals, and herbal foods to help our livestock recover from dis-ease. In this column, I hope to relay some of the information we have compiled over the years to help other farmers and their animals with their struggle against dis-ease.

The first question I received asked what can be done when cattle and calves have respiratory type dis-eases. Of course, the first area of question would be management. Making sure animals are well bedded, ventilated, and fed a balanced diet are the foundation for healthy dis-ease resistant animals. Being observant of what signs of abnormality the animal is showing us will lead you to what body systems are in need of nutritional intervention. Some of the typical signs that can be observed are a runny nose, hair that is rough looking or standing up, coughing, labored breathing, an appetite that is starting to or has disappeared, and the condition of the animals bowel movements. The most important system of the body needing address in an ill animal is the bowels. If you are naturally observant, you may have already noticed the changes that occur in the formation of the manure prior to any other outward signs of illness. The following suggestions are for cattle whose dis-ease process has been detected early on:

- For loose bowels in calves, we have had success using slippery elm bark powder. We use 2 Tablespoons in milk along with a natural type of vitamins A, D, and E powder that is accepted by your certifier, along with a suitable lactobacillus bacteria supplement twice daily (vitamin supplements differ, use as directed on label). Be sure to use the mixture quickly as it will gel once milk is mixed with slippery elm powder.
- For cattle and large heifers, we use 4 Tablespoons slippery elm bark powder twice daily plus the recommended amounts of vitamins A, D, and E and lactobacillus bacteria that are stated on the labels of the products you have chosen.
- For calves with hard or non-existent movements, we use 1 teaspoon Cascara Sagrada herb powder along with the vitamin and bacteria supplements mentioned above. For cows, we use 2 to 4 Tablespoons Cascara Sagrada (depending on the size of the cow) along with vitamin and lactobacillus supplementation. The Cascara Sagrada should be put in water and used in a drench tube as the Cascara Sagrada is very bitter.

Once we have addressed the bowels, we move to the respiratory system. We have found a combination of Lobelia and Comfrey to work very well at relieving labored breathing. The great thing about using Comfrey is that it grows quite well here in the Northeast. Farmers in Europe have also discovered its benefits as they actually use it as a forage. It is very nutritious and produces good tonnage per acre.

- The amount used for calves with respiratory distress is 1 teaspoon each of Comfrey powder and Lobelia powder mixed in milk twice daily until normal breathing returns.
- A good preventative for respiratory illnesses in calves is one teaspoon Black Walnut hulls powder twice daily in their milk. It supplies a great deal of B complex vitamins and bioflavonoids useful in reducing weather stresses.
- For adult cattle, we use 2 Tablespoons of Lobelia in the evenings for two days, then skip two days, then give for two more days as to not stress the calf she may be carrying. If the cow is not pregnant, then it may be used daily. The Comfrey (root or leaf powder), along with the Lobelia, is used at the rate of 4 Tablespoons twice daily. We add in 1 Tablespoon Cayenne Pepper until symptoms are relieved.

Remember these two areas, watch and listen to what your animals are trying to tell you about their health, and using good sound management practices are the keys to avoiding many health problems in the first place. It is also important to check with your certifier on the certification status of products that you may use before beginning the use of these products.