

Depending on the size of your herd, it is not uncommon to have at least one newborn calf develop swelling in its naval area. If this occurs, it is important to know what you are facing so that you can develop an appropriate treatment plan. This week we will discuss the two main issues that cause naval swelling, and will offer recommendations of how to treat and prevent them from further affecting your herd.

Often, if swelling of the naval area is detected in a very young calf, the cause is typically either an umbilical hernia or an umbilical abscess. In order to properly treat the swelling, it is important to accurately diagnose the root of the issue. A hernia is defined as a “protrusion of an organ or tissue through an opening in its surrounding walls”. One way to determine if the swelling is caused by a hernia is to lay the calf on its back. If you are able to gently massage the lump so that it goes back into the abdominal cavity, you are most likely dealing with an umbilical hernia. If this is the case, surgery is the best treatment method for resolving this issue. It is wise to have the hernia repaired before selling the calf, as repairing will increase the value of the calf. What would be an almost worthless calf at the sale barn may be turned into a calf that will have a significant amount of worth simply by repairing the hernia. Unfortunately, there is no known preventative for keeping umbilical hernias from affecting your herd.

An abscess, which also results in swelling, is frequently caused by bacteria that create a collection of pus in the body. Lay the calf on its back similar to if you were examining the calf for a hernia. If the swelling does not go back into the abdominal cavity after gentle massaging, the swelling is likely caused by an abscess. If you believe this is the case, do not attempt to lance the area, as this will only introduce more bacteria to the infected area. Instead, treatment should consist of an antibiotic- preferably Draxxin because it is a long acting, single dose product. Because umbilical abscesses are typically caused by bacteria, it is possible to prevent them from occurring. This can be achieved by creating a clean and dry environment to house the calves for the first few weeks of life, as this will help prevent bacteria from infecting the naval cord.

Whether the swelling is caused by a hernia or an abscess is secondary. The most important step to resolving the issue is to detect it in the first place. Closely examine the naval areas of your calves, and pay special attention to those that are the outliers- calves with abnormally large naval areas compared to their herd mates. As with any issue, it is best to know what you are facing before you begin treatment. If you have any doubts, a veterinarian should examine your calf so that the animal can be treated properly, increasing its value in the long run.

Thanks,

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