



August 2013

An Opportunity to Participate in the Calf Component of the NAHMS Dairy 2014 Study

Selected dairy producers have a unique opportunity to participate in the calf component of the USDA's National Animal Health Monitoring System's (NAHMS) Dairy 2014 study. This component will focus exclusively on U.S. dairy heifer calves from birth to weaning. Specifically, it will:

- Describe practices related to colostrum management, milk feeding, and calf housing;
- Evaluate colostrum quality and passive transfer;
- Estimate the incidence of disease in calves and its relationship with management factors;
- Evaluate calf growth rates based on different milk feeding approaches; and
- Test calves for persistent infection with bovine viral diarrhea virus.

Why should you participate?

There are several benefits to participating in the calf component of the Dairy 2014 study. For example, you'll receive a customized report detailing test results from samples taken at your operation during the project. You'll also receive valuable information on your colostrum management program, the growth rate of your heifer calves, and the BVD status of individual calves on your operation. In addition, you'll get a summary report comparing the results from your operation with those of the other participating operations.

What participation involves

During March and April 2014, representatives from USDA's Veterinary Services will visit your farm to administer the second questionnaire for the NAHMS Dairy 2014 study. During this time, a subset of operations will be chosen to participate in the study's calf component.

If your operation is chosen and you decide to participate, each month two of your heifer calves will be enrolled in the calf component, for a total of 24 calves over a 14-month period. Enrolled calves must be alive at least 24 hours following birth to be considered part of the study.

Samples to be tested:

- Colostrum (1/2 of enrolled calves) for IgG
- Blood for total protein and IgG
- Ear notches for BVD
- Feces (1/2 of enrolled calves) for parasites

Information to be collected:

- Birth data
- Feeding and housing data
- Height and weight every 2 weeks until weaning
- Any disease episodes and treatments
- Vaccinations
- Weaning data

The calf component of Dairy 2014 will run from March or April 2014 through May or June of 2015. Before you commit to participating, keep in mind that you will have to devote some of your time to complete the project. For example, the amount of time spent for each individual calf will be minimal, but producers will be asked to record some data and help coordinate the project. You don't, however, have to do it all by yourself. Participating producers will have the opportunity to work with "cooperators" from, or associated with, NAHMS. These professionals can help collect samples, plan, and coordinate, and may include veterinarians, animal and dairy scientists, and extension personnel.

Common questions about the calf component

How do I sign up?

When the veterinary medical officer or animal health technician visits you to complete the study's second questionnaire, let them know you are interested in the calf component of the study.

How many cows do I need to participate?

Operations must have at least 30 dairy cows.

What if there aren't 24 heifer calves born on my operation during the study period?

If 24 heifer calves are not born during the 12- to 14-month period, your participation is still valuable, as long as you have at least 30 cows.

What if my heifer calves are raised offsite?

You can still enroll as long as you can be sure that the information and samples will be collected at the rearing facility.

I have more than 2 heifer calves born per month.

Can I enroll as many calves as I want to per month?

No. Calves need to be enrolled over a 12- to 14-month period so the seasonal variation of disease can be evaluated.

I am a seasonal producer, milking 100 cows. I have no calvings during at least 6 months of the year.

Can I still participate?

Possibly. These situations will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

I can't collect the samples; can someone help me?

Yes. We have a line-up of professionals that can be of assistance. If the veterinary medical officer or animal health technician that conducted the interview can't perform the sampling, then we recommend using either your private veterinarian (unfortunately NAHMS cannot compensate for this expense) or university / extension personnel. NAHMS will have a list of cooperators in your State willing to assist.

What if I enroll and then decide to stop participating before enrolling 24 calves?

The study is voluntary. You may discontinue enrolling calves at any time. However, this is a national study and NAHMS needs the results from 300 operations and 7,200 calves to get accurate estimates. If you feel you can't commit for the duration, please don't sign up to participate.

Are there any costs associated with participating?

There are no costs for testing. There are also no costs associated with sampling and coordination of the study, unless your private veterinarian is involved and charges you for his or her services.



Our operation is already testing for passive transfer using total protein and BVD testing; should we participate?

Absolutely. However, we need you to collect all samples as outlined and send them to us for testing. For quality control and standardization purposes, we need to test all samples in one of our participating laboratories, even if you do a great job collecting and testing your own samples.

Can I or my employees collect the samples and coordinate the study ourselves?

Yes, you can collect the samples and coordinate the shipping of samples to the appropriate laboratory. We would encourage you to solicit the assistance of other professionals with any problems you might encounter during the study.

For more information, contact:

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