



Colostrum for Your Livestock Bottle Babies

Knowing whether and how to feed your bottle baby colostrum or colostrum replacer is just one thing to consider when raising baby livestock.

By Sue Weaver

In this article ... What Is Colostrum? Not Enough Colostrum? Colostrum Alternatives Colostrum Feeding Chart A floppy-eared baby goat caroming through the house or a soft, black lamb to cuddle after supper--if there's anything more fun and satisfying than raising bottle babies, I don't know what it is.

There are lots of good reasons to raise bottle-baby livestock, including mine: It's a relatively inexpensive way to add popular genetics to my breeding stock, the youngsters raised this way are friendlier and more easily handled than their dam-raised peers, and the satisfaction of successfully raising a favorite bottle-fed lamb or kid is priceless.

There are plenty of questions and preparation to consider, too.

Knowing whether you need colostrum or colostrum replacer is an important consideration when your raising a bottle baby.

What Is Colostrum?

Colostrum is the thick, immunoglobulin-rich, first milk that all livestock babies need to ingest in order to survive.

Colostrum Feeding Chart

Days 1-2 Feed 2 to 3 ounces of colostrum every three hours

Days 3-4 Feed 3 to 5 ounces colostrum, gradually changing over to milk replacer, every four hours

Days 5-14 Feed 4 to 6 ounces milk replacer, four times a day

Days 15-21 Feed 6 to 8 ounces, four times a day

Days 22-41 Work up gradually to 16 ounces, three times a day
42 +Begin slowly decreasing the morning and evening feedings, leaving the middle feeding of 16 ounces, until you've eliminated the morning and evening feedings entirely (Baby will be eating his share of hay or pasture by then). Continue with one, 16-ounce bottle for two more weeks, then eliminate bottle feedings entirely. Neonates' immune systems remain nonfunctional for weeks to months, depending on their species. However, they're born with the ability to absorb disease-fighting antibodies from their mothers' milk, but only for a short period of time after birth.

A lamb, for example, should ideally ingest one ounce of colostrum per pound of bodyweight within one hour after birth and another three ounces per pound of bodyweight spread over eight to 12 feedings during its first 24 hours of life. After 12 to 24 hours, it can no longer absorb antibodies through the wall of its small intestine, so time is of the essence.

What If Babies Don't Get Enough Colostrum?

Babies that don't ingest enough colostrum are much more likely to succumb to disease during infancy. That's why livestock-auction babies are an especially poor risk. If you buy one, you won't know anything about his background and by being at the sale barn, he'll be exposed to diseases he isn't equipped to handle. If you succumb to a cute and needy sale-barn baby (and it's easy to do), raise him indoors away from other livestock and watch him like a hawk: At the first sign of illness, rush him to a vet!

Colostrum Alternatives

If you're willing to take a brand-new baby that hasn't yet ingested colostrum, you need to have a supply on hand to feed him. Many breeders freeze it for emergencies, so ask around and locate some in case you need it.

Alternately, use an oral IgG (immunoglobulin) supplement designed for your baby's species; they're expensive, but they have a refrigerator shelf life of two years—if you raise many babies, sooner or later you'll need it.

Seramune Equine IgG, Seramune Bovine IgG and Goat Serum Concentrate are typical IgG supplements produced by Sera, Inc., (www.seramune.com) for foals, calves and kids respectively (shepherds use Goat Serum Concentrate for



newborn lambs, as well).

These are not the same thing as the powdered supplements (based on cow colostrum) that you'll find on the shelf at your local feed store; if you don't have frozen colostrum or an oral IgG supplement, try the powdered variety.

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