Survey of Calf Management Practices on Vermont Dairy Farms

Abstract

Proper calf care is of the utmost importance on a dairy farm since heifer calves are the replacement animals expected to enter the milking herd. Sub-standard calf management practices affect animal well-being, as well as farm productivity and profitability. To evaluate whether dairy calf management practices in Vermont are following the best practices in line with national trends, a mixed-mode survey was conducted. An invitation to participate was mailed to 886 dairy farms. Of these, 179 respondents indicated their preference of taking the survey online, face-to-face, by mail, or by telephone. The questions addressed various aspects of calf management such as calving, nutrition, housing, biosecurity, number of deaths (mortality) and disease occurrence (morbidity). Based on 90 responses, the areas of nutrition and biosecurity require further improvement. Similarities were seen with the results of this survey to the findings from the national USDA survey in the areas of housing and calf health. Further analysis may reveal a relationship between management gaps and the morbidity and mortality rates of the calves. Future educational efforts can be focused on the areas of calf management where improvement is needed.