Fresh cow health is obviously very important to every dairy. The smoother the transition for a cow through the close-up pen, calving and the fresh period, the more milk she will make over the course of the lactation. Not only will you decrease medicine and labor costs, but you will also make more money from increased production. Cows who have an easy transition period also typically have less trouble breeding back, and are more likely to remain in the herd.

However, ensuring that smooth transition period is very difficult. Natural variations in every cow’s metabolism will lead to occasional problems, and the more we push these cows for increased production, the closer we push them toward that line where metabolic problems become more likely. Waiting until after a cow or a group of cows freshen can help a dairyman deal with a potential problem before it becomes an outbreak.

The use of anionic salts in the close-up ration has been fairly standard in the dairy industry for years. Anionic salts help the cow metabolize calcium from her skeletal system and prepare her for the high calcium requirements of early lactation.

It has been shown that there is a correlation between a cow’s urine pH and her blood calcium and phosphorus levels. This allows us to use a quick test to spot-check how our close-up ration is doing in the effort to prepare our cows to handle the transition.
Monitoring fresh cow health:

Checking urine pHs in close-up cows

period. We don’t typically want to use this test to find individual problem cows, we just want to monitor the fresh cow program as a whole.

The ideal cows for this test are cows that experienced nearly the entire close-up period, so we recommend weekly testing of second lactation or greater cows who are within 48-72 hours of their due date. There are several ways to collect urine samples from locked-up cows, including the administration of furosemide, turning on the flush, or trying to ‘feather’ a cow (stimulating her perineum with a light rubbing motion). You should try to test between 8-10 cows a week, and try to collect the sample midstream. Midstream samples are less likely to be contaminated with vaginal mucus or feces and, therefore, give a better representative pH level. Collect the sample in a clean, dry container. The milk sample tubes we sell are perfect collection vials for urine too.

Once you have collected the samples, they should be analyzed or refrigerated. Testing the pH of the samples can be done either with a digital pH meter or with pH paper. Either is acceptable, and although a digital pH meter is probably more accurate, pH paper is easier to use and requires less investment to get started. We regularly measure urine pHs for some of our dairies in our milk quality lab, as well.

The desired range of pH is between 6-7. Higher than 7 means that more anionic salts should be fed. Lower than 6 means too much are being fed, which can be expensive, wasteful, and in the extreme, can lead to other types of metabolic problems. We look to have fewer than 10% of the cows outside of the target range, and when more than 10% of the cows are outside the target range, we recommend looking at the ration and considering a change.

If you need to re-examine your fresh cow protocols, or wish to institute a urine pH testing protocol, please contact your herd veterinarian, as there is no one better to help you get started.

Testing close-up cows to evaluate for fresh cow metabolic health.

- Test cows who are within a few days of calving
- Test 8-10 second lactation or greater cows several times a month
- Collect urine from locked up cows either by giving them furosemide, feathering them, or turning on the flush (Which works great, but can be messy if you are running through flush water to try to collect several cows at once. Use two guys, it helps).
- Collect urine mid-stream to get the most accurate results.
- Measure the pH as soon as possible, or place the samples in a refrigerator
- Use paper or a digital pH meter to measure the pHs
- A desirable range for urine pH is between 6 and 7.
- A pH that is lower than 6 means anionic salts are being fed too heavily. Too many salts in the feed may affect palatability and lead to decreased intakes.
- A pH that is higher than 7 means not enough anionic salts are being fed.
- Discuss this protocol with your herd health veterinarian if you have any questions.
Meet our support staff: The People Who Keep Valley Vets Running.

Alison Storey, the youngest member of our team, works in the milk quality lab processing samples. Alison will receive her A.S. in Dairy Science from COS this December. She has been working in the milk quality lab for two and a half years while living with her mom and brother in Visalia. Alison spends her free time caring for her horse, Blue, and Queensland Heeler, Dally.

Kerri Clark, who works as a microbiologist, has been with Valley Vets for two and a half years. She has her A.S. in Animal Science. Many of you speak to her on a regular basis, when she calls you to report positive cases of infectious mastitis. She lives in Tulare with her daughter, Cheyenna, and their many pets. Ask her about the newest addition to their family: Baby Gus, a desert tortoise.

Jen Jacobi is a native of Visalia and a graduate of Central Valley Christian High School. After obtaining a B.F.A. in Writing from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, Jen returned to the valley to pay off her student loans. Jen has been working as Valley Vets’ receptionist for one year. She keeps busy answering the phone, processing pharmaceutical orders and telling the vets where to go. She enjoys reading, writing, red wine, and debating politics with Dr. Altena.

Erik Alcaraz is our newest employee. He was hired to pick up the milk sample route, and for other veterinary technician duties, which have already kept him busier than expected. He and his wife, Jesus, have been married 6 years, and have 2 daughters, Valeria, 3 yrs and Marianna, 17 months. Erik has a lot of experience in the dairy industry as his previous job was managing a dairy in Waukena.

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Pam Hubbard has been working at Valley Vets for over twenty years in various positions. She currently serves as the front office administrator. While she’s not crunching numbers and keeping everything in order, she can be found spending time with her loving husband, John, and their two children, Sarah and Johnny. Pam also enjoys knitting, scrapbooking, hiking, biking, and taking care of her grandson, Asa.

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In this edition of the newsletter, we decided to introduce you to some of our staff, the people who do the vital functions that keep us running smoothly.
Feel free to contact us, or talk with your herd-health veterinarian about any questions or feedback you have on our newsletter or any of our services. We're here for your benefit.

A newsletter for California milk makers

Calf Health:

**Navel Dips Revisited**

Recently we have been discussing navel disinfection in the newsletter and several questions have been asked regarding different products.

There are a few products being marketed as suitable for use, but they do not live up to their billing: Naveldyne is a topical disinfectant with hardly any ability to help stop infection when the navel is dipped. Another product is Triodine 7, which looks and sounds like tincture of iodine. It is not. The active ingredient is only 2.8% iodine, which is similar to the most potent teat dip.

The only product that will consistently sterilize and dessicate a navel is strong tincture of iodine. With the winter season upon us and more calves being born into a colder, wetter environment it is important to use the strongest product available, which is 7% strong tincture of iodine. Don’t be fooled. If you are going to give your calves the best start possible, use this. It’s worth it.