

Bringing Up Baby

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Part I Summary

Part I which appeared in the Oct-Dec 1988 issue of Buffalo! dealt with the feeding and weaning of a buffalo calf.

Day 1 feedings should be the ever important Colostrum. "The more the better is the rule for colostrum in the first twelve hours. It is not the rule for later feedings of milk and replacers.

Day 2 feedings should be formula. A few days later start the calf on grain and grass or hay, remembering to always keep clean, cold water available. Be sure to find out what mineral deficiencies you area has and add that supplement to your feed formulation. Weaning should begin at about 3 months and finish off at 5-6 months.

When working with buffalo calves, caution is the best advice!

Raising a bottle baby is not just feeding it properly. It takes time to properly nurture a calf. You must fill all the functions that a buffalo cow would provide: protection, grooming, affection and companionship. As well, you must cope with the additional problems brought on by taking the calf out of its natural social structure. These additional problems are stress, disease, and identity. The most significant of all problems is *stress*.

Stress

Stress is one of the factors most people over look in hand raising young livestock. However, stress will be the *major cause* of most all your problems!!!

Natural stresses are the elements: cold, heat, flies, etc. Normally Bison are more than prepared to handle the elements.

However, Buffalo are wild in nature and humans are stressful for them to be around. A very young buffalo of a day old will "imprint" to a particular human and even to a few humans but the rest are still stressful to them.

Imprinting is the term used for nature's process of a calf "bonding" to a cow by its scent and presence during the first day or two of life. In fact when a calf is born it does not know that a buffalo cow is the "mother". At this time it will accept some other mother

such as a human mom. This imprinting time is very short and with every passing hour the calf learns filial responses from the cow, including to have fear of humans. That is why *if you must* take a calf away from the cow, it is much less stressful on the calf to do this immediately after it nurses once or twice and can still imprint with another mom. After this imprinting period is over, the calf has to *learn* to associate with a human, it will no longer be a natural thing.

It will also be much easier on you to raise a calf that has imprinted to you. The calf will follow you around very closely just as it would the cow. It, of course, will be stressed when you leave it because the cow would not do this. Suppose that the cow died or was to be slaughtered and the calf was older than a couple of days. I found that cutting off the cow's chin hair and using this to wrap around the bottle as well as keeping it with you to hold out each time you come up to the calf will calm it down. The scent of the cow triggers it to accept you as the cow and gradually it recognizes your scent and you can stop using the hair. (Keep the trimmed hair tightly sealed in a baggy to preserve as much scent as possible.

The herd instinct is very strong and that is why taking them away from other animals is extremely stressful. Even your company is not 24 hours a day and their herd instinct demands

Part II

companionship all the time. Some people have actually taken the baby buffalo into the home and raised it for a few months as you might a dog. This seems cute for a while but you will probably regret it later. You will be more successful raising a *healthy* buffalo if you keep it with the herd or with young beef or dairy calves. To take a buffalo you may not want it to associate with other livestock but remember you are *really putting it under stress*, and doubly so if you take it around for groups to see! Two calves for exhibit would be better.

Stress causes lowered resistance to disease. Confining a baby buffalo to a barn or small pen encourages disease to flourish unless you keep the area very dry and clean. Heat stress this summer was the cause of a heart attack for a calf that one of our member's was raising. Of course this calf had the stress of being an orphan, alone; the added stress of inactivity most of every day (the pen was very small) and the stress of the heat was too much. Weaning a calf is also stressful. Halter breaking or saddling a calf is extremely stressful. Keep the stress to a minimum at one time if you want to keep the calf alive.

Diseases of Orphan Calves

Probably the most common diseases you will encounter in an orphan calf are Scours and/or Pneumonia,
(continued on page 31)



BRINGING UP BABY (continued from page 11)

Navel Infection, and a basic assortment of respiratory infections associated with stress and the lowered resistance that stress causes.

Scours & white scours: These are terms used for diarrhea. The cause may be immune deficiency leading to a bacterial or viral infection. As we discussed in Part I, only colostrum, colostrum replacers or a blood transfusion will prevent this condition. Even with colostrum a calf can have a vectorial or viral infection (but has a chance to recover). It may also be caused by human moms feeding too much milk. The initial onset of scouring causes dehydration and the continued progression to white scours or bloody scours will lead to death very quickly (48 hours or so).

Caution!!! Watch for runny stools and add 4 Large Tablespoons of Kaopectate (unflavored) to milk. *If stools turn white*-take off of milk and give *Vy-Trate* (or other electrolyte) as per directions!!! You may need to give Gentimycin if fever is present. See your vet and have the calf treated just as if it were a beef calf. *Neomycin Scour Bolus* with Vitamin A, Kaolin, Pectin and *Terramycin Scour Tablets* are an excellent combination to give immediately along with the *Vy-Trate*.

We use a calf dosage and continue every 12 hours for several days. Don't stop just because the calf quits scouring, keep on a day or two more. Small doses for short periods of time just encourage the infective agent to become drug resistant. Keep these supplies on hand before calving season.

The navel is an easy entry site for infection. The cow usually licks this area frequently and keeps it clean. Spraying the navel with iodine once or twice for the first day or two will accelerate drying and closing of the navel and help keep it free of infection in the meantime. An enlarged knee joint may signal an infection from the navel or the infection may be systemic. See your vet and have the calf treated as he would for a beef calf.

Any other illness your calf has should be diagnosed and treated by your vet just as if it were a beef calf. This is the state of our knowledge at this time.

Exceptions noted: Tranquillizing is the exception to this rule. Contact a professional in tranquillizing wild animals if you must put a buffalo completely under. That is a totally different area. (We noted a report by one of our producers in the last issue that he had lost some buffalo by using the

pour on product "*Total On*"). I also noted a pour on product that was not recommended for use on Brahmas and I took note of their close similarities and would not use the product.

As we are still learning please have your vet notify us if any other exceptions seem to prevail so we can inform all of our producers. Please remember *not* to rope a buffalo around the throat. While this does not seem to hurt beef calves, it has been known to injure and even kill bison. Rope the horns or feet. Also *do not use* beef calf dosages *by age* on bison, use dosages by body weight. Bison calves are lighter for their age than beef calves.

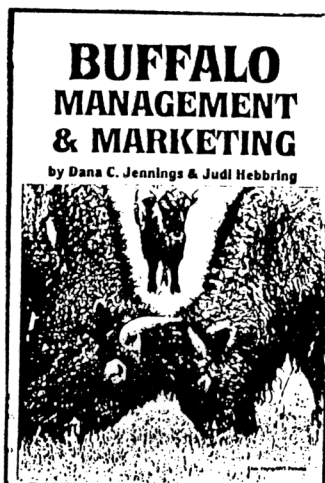
Vaccinations

I have made it a practice to vaccinate my orphan calves at about 2 months for 8-way/clostridium (this includes black leg and over eating diseases) and give the female calves a brucellosis vaccination as early as 3 months and before 9 months. If a calf is vaccinated very early then I vaccinate for clostridium again at the time I work all the calves in the fall. If the calf was grazing on short pastures or kept in a small area you should worm with Ivermec and perhaps give it a pink-eye Vaccination as well as Vitamin A,D, & B Complex injection. Keep records of dates.

As early as 6 to 8 weeks your bottle babies should receive a preventative combination vaccination with IBS/BVD/PI3/BRSV (Cattlemaster). AT weaning time, approximately 7 months, you should re-vaccinate with the IBS/BVD/PI3/BRSV. Use Cattlemaster+ which includes Lepto/Vibrio for females. (Note: there are other brands, Cattlemaster is the one used here.)

Vaccinations are a preventative measure and strengthen the immune system. Many bison producers do not use these vaccinations. However, I would certainly vaccinate if I were taking any babies on exhibits, if they were in contact with orphan beef calves, or were going to be sold at an auction. Vaccinations would be given at least a couple of weeks before they are stressed by shipping, showing, or introduction to other livestock. Check with your vet and proceed as you would for beef calves.

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Prevention is the best avenue! Give Colostrum immediately, spray the newborn calf's navel with iodine, give a therapeutic injection of broad spectrum antibiotic and keep warm and dry with very clean bedding. Reduce as much stress as possible and vaccinate as soon as possible.

Mothering

Another factor often overlooked in raising an orphan calf is the parenting of that calf. Buffalo protect their young not only from predators but also from the pecking order of the herd. This must come from you. They need to feel secure. A pen and/or barn need to be secure enough that dogs, and other harassing elements can't bother a calf alone. Of course peers are the best security blanket. Beef or dairy calves or cows will do. I like to keep mine in the herd if possible but I do have a calf barn if the calf is sick and really needs attention.

As I mentioned a calf will not come to a feeder with older buffalo until it gets to be about 9 months old and yet it will rarely leave the herd to go alone to the feeder to eat. The herd instinct is strong. I train my calves to come up from the pasture twice a day for a bottle when I honk on the car horn but the calf will only leave the herd for my protection and when I leave, it goes back to the herd. Try to have two or three people start from the beginning to bottle feed the calf. That way one person isn't tied down and the calf isn't stressed by strangers.

The other aspects of parenting for a calf are the grooming and keeping it free of faecal material where flies will lay eggs.

Keep a hose or bucket handy. Even if you leave your calf in the pasture it will let you keep it clean as long as you do this from the beginning. Keep the calf clean from the first day. Use an old wash cloth and keep the face free of milk and keep its bottom clean. That is also an excellent way to train the calf not to kick. Combing the calf will yield you a lot of good hair as well as be nurturing for the calf. Keep the pen and bedding clean if the calf is not out on pasture. Sunshine, exercise, and fresh, cold water are essential for good appetite.

Affection is appreciated by a bison for just about 7 to 8 months. The calf will generally like scratching, playing,

petting, and in general just having you there until weaning time. It is probably longer if the calf is totally without peers. However, when with other buffalo or beef cattle, your bottle baby will start to show its independence at about 8 months. It will independently start to interact with the other weanlings and defy you. This is when you are no longer regarded as the protector and become one of the pecking order. The calf will gradually test you, checking to see who is stronger. One day you will lose. This is the time to let the calf drift back to being a buffalo and to stop interacting with it at all. Calves kept away from the herd completely will probably delay this independence but sooner or later they will test you. Not having any fear and having the instinct for dominance is what makes these bottle babies so dangerous. They really aren't trying to be mean, it is just their instinct and only a few individuals really become 90% domesticated.

Lots of exercise is needed by a baby bison and the pen should be large enough for that or you will need to jog with it several times a day as it grows. Again, the calf requires lots of companionship of some kind. It is a herd animal.

Prevention

It will make life a lot easier if you try to prevent having to raise a bottle baby. Some problem areas can be reversed if you are attentive at calving time.

First Calf Heifers

Keep your eye out for the heifer who has never calved before and does not have the instinct to let her calf nurse. This calf you may not have to hand raise but you should keep your eye on the heifer until you notice she nurses the calf. If you do not see the calf nursing then feed colostrum. This will give you a chance to give the heifer longer to take her calf and not jeopardize the calf's health. You may need to put the heifer in a squeeze chute and tie her leg back to let the calf nurse. Doing this for the first couple of times usually teaches the heifer what to do. I always keep a pair up several days to be sure the calf is being taken care of by the cow before turning them out.

Separate bulls from the cow herd. This year when one of my two year old

heifers calved, she was being chased by young yearling bulls and got separated from her calf. She didn't know what to do and by the time I got there some other cows were cleaning up the calf. The Step-Cows took turns letting the calf nurse. However, these cows had calved some time before so they had no colostrum in their milk and I knew I would have to get the heifer up and also feed the calf some colostrum if I was going to save it. This could have been avoided by keeping the bulls in a pasture away from the cows at calving time. I've learned my lesson.

Watching your cow herd twice a day if you have a small enough area to cover will alert you to calving problems. You will also be able to spot an orphan in time to feed colostrum and save it. Take pen and paper so you can record calving dates and cows with problems or one that won't take a calf. Records are important. Of course large herds may just accept their losses.

Remember this is February, line up some colostrum and order some of the basic items you will need in an emergency:

1. An electrolyte...Vy-Trate is good as it is bottle fed.

Other types are injectables.

2. Scour boluses, Bolus calf gun.

3. A broad spectrum antibiotic. Syringe & needles.

4. Iodine Spray.

5. Beef calf nursing bottle and nipple.

Last but not least find a vet who will not faint when you mention buffalo!

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