

# Pro Earth Animal Health



Copyright 2017, Pro Earth Animal Health

# The Economic Impact of Scours

The far-reaching effects scours can have on an operation is mind-boggling. Most people see the economic impact it has right up-front, but don't always think about the long-term issues that can stem from even just the target of 2% -3% of a herd's calves contracting scours.

## Short-term Economics of Calf Scours



For most cattle operations, it's not *if* scours hits, but *when*. Following all of the protocols to minimize the number of animals that will come down with scours is the first and best line of defense against this insidious condition. To better understand the short-term expenses associated with a case of scours, it's necessary to break it down into the different cost categories.

## Medications Costs

In instances where the source of the scours is bacterial or a secondary bacterial infection may occur, antibiotics will need to be administered. The average cost of this treatment, depending on what is used and the number of doses needed, can run anywhere from \$4.00 to \$12.00 per head. Consider a herd of 1,000 calves in which 10% (or 100 head) of those calves is stricken with scours. That puts the producer anywhere from \$400 to \$1,200 in the red.

## Intravenous Fluids Costs

In many cases of scours, dehydration is a factor and those affected calves must receive hydration therapy. This can be another blow to the checkbook. The average calf requires 5.5 liters (1,000 ml) of 0.9% Sodium Chloride Solution. The average price for a 1-liter bag of fluids is \$10.00. An 18-gauge catheter will cost around \$1.60, then there is the IV administration set running another \$4.29. For a SINGLE calf, the total on this will cost close to \$26.00. If all 100 of those calves present with dehydration that requires treatment, that's another \$2,600.00. This is all before it's clear whether those calves will survive or not.

## Labor Costs

Assuming a calf will be staying with its mother and won't be bottle fed, the labor cost for administering medications and fluids will run an average of \$20.00. If a calf requires greater attention, that cost could double or triple, depending on how much time is spent treating it. With just an "average" amount of labor those 100 calves require, the total comes to \$2,000. A veterinary farm call will also be required at \$125, on average. If the vet has to visit twice, that's another \$250 of scours-related expenses. This brings labor to \$2,250.

## Nutritional Support

Calves that have been pulled from their mothers for treatment require nutritional support to not only support their regular caloric needs, but also to combat

acidosis and excessive shrink. By way of example, a bag of Purina Farm and Ranch Calf Milk Replacer costs around \$37.00, putting the cost per feeding (as per recommendations of the manufacturer) around \$6.16 per day. Assuming the calf will only require two days of nutritional support, that is \$12.32 per head, totaling \$1,232.00.

With these numbers added up, \$7,282.00 has already been spent before these calves are even weaned. Other cost factors that are more difficult to estimate include electricity or gas for heating in colder climates, disinfectants for areas in which the calves have been housed, bottles and nipples, etc.

### Long-Term Economic Impacts



The short-term costs of scours can be frightening enough, but when the long-term projections are put into focus, the financially devastating effects of scours drive home the importance of prevention.

### 30 Pounds in 30 Days

Unfortunately, “30 pounds in 30 days” is NOT a positive weight loss slogan for cattle. This is, however, the average a calf can be expected to lose and not ever gain back. This is assuming the calf survives. At the current market price of \$1.28/lb, that is a loss of \$38.40 per head, bringing the shrink cost on those 100 calves to \$3,840.00. Adding this number to the treatment costs above, that is a hit that comes in around \$15,000.

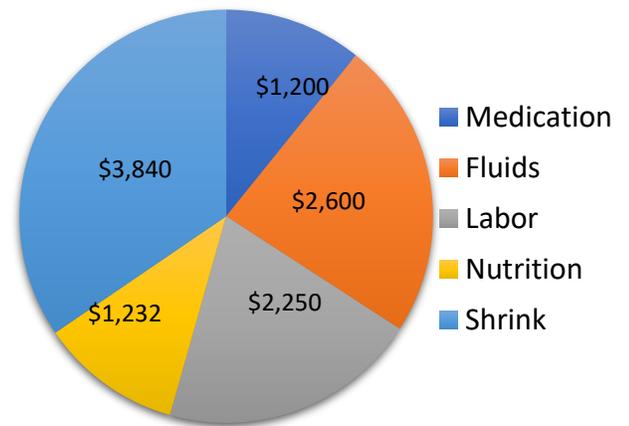
### The Cost of Mortality

The ugly truth is that some scours calves will die or will have to be put down, regardless of intervention. This becomes a total loss and throws the bottom line for those calves into the negative. Again, assuming that the current rate is \$1.28/lb and the projected finished weight

on a calf is 600 lbs, the potential loss on that animal comes out to \$768 +/- . In the instance that none of the 100 calves survived, despite treatment, another \$76,800 is lost, in addition to the above treatment costs. In this scenario, the potential overall losses due to scours, including treatments, would be \$84,082.00

Obviously, this is all worst-case scenario, but it drives home just how important having a solid prevention program in place is. Between good nutrition for gestating cows, a well-executed vaccination program and immune support, the bottom line can actually end up well in the black.

## Scours Economic Impact (per 100 head)



Total:

**\$7,282.00**