**The calf in the cattle fattening farm**

stable prophylaxis and drinking system in comparison

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Introduction:

Cattle fatteners face major problems with every new purchase.

They buy not only calves, but also all viruses, bacteria and fungi from the respective farms of origin. When the calves go through the livestock trade, this burden is even higher, the animals are often exposed to several days of transport, reloading and many other stressful situations. This leads to the fact that the immune situation of these ever younger animals is disastrous.

Routine antibiotic prophylaxis is therefore very often applied in Austria either via the feed in the first 1-2 weeks or/and all animals are treated immediately after unloading with a depot of antibiotics.

Since both measures are only conditionally effective, it is quite common to ensure the survival of the frequently ill animals by repeated single animal treatments in the first weeks after stabling.

Nevertheless, the losses, especially in the cold season, are often very high and this means not only an immense expenditure of time but also high financial losses.

How can this be changed?

Three aspects

**1: Drinking and feeding management:**

An essential question for the fattener is: should or must milk still be offered or not?

There are various considerations: the calves offered today by dairy farms are becoming younger and younger. In some cases, calves as young as 5-6 weeks are sent to the farmer. These animals are of course still dependent on milk and very often not sufficiently prepared for feeding. Due to the mostly existing milk surplus in the farms of origin, it can be assumed that most of the so young calves only know whole milk, either warm in the teat bucket or cold, acidified, ad libidum.

Calves are often hardly used to drinking water and do not nibble enough on hay, in the best case on TMR (Total Mixed Ration) for calves. The calf rearing still diverges very strongly in Austria and really effective preparation for good feeding performance and therefore a good switch to fattening is very rare.

For young calves, however, the supply of fresh milk, warm or acidified, at least until the end of the 7th week of life, would be the best physiological solution.

However, this is not possible in the majority of pure fattening farms, unless there is a farm cooperation with a dairy farm.

The logical alternative would be the milk substitute.

I consider the use of milk replacers to be problematic from a holistic point of view. No matter how well calculated an industrial product may be, it never comes close to the quality of the natural product "whole milk from healthy cows". In any case, it must be clear that every milk substitute means a massive change in feed for the calf and that this step must be considered carefully. If the purchased calves are already 8 weeks and older and reasonably familiar with eating, you should skip the intermediate step "milk substitute" and switch directly to a high-quality calf TMR plus good fine hay for the first 2 weeks after stabling. In the case of significantly younger animals, milk replacement feeding will be necessary, but only silage-free feed components and a high-quality exchanger should then be used. The often double feed conversion of silo-containing feed and milk substitute often leads to severe diarrhoea in the already weakened animals.

Since fattening calves are also ruminants, one should always be aware that EVERY change in the feed of the cattle must be slowly introduced over a period of 2-4 weeks. This is the only way to avoid massive disturbances in rumen digestion. Each disturbance in the digestion means again a worsening of the immune situation.

**2: Water:**

Many calves are not sufficiently accustomed to drinking water when stabled. In order to make it easier for them to take the step of learning to drink, bright water troughs with tempered water are very advantageous.

**3: Standards of hygiene:**

This is an important, although equally unpleasant topic, since it involves a lot of work.

The fact is, however, that the risk of infection in an already dirty box is much higher than when calves are stalled in clean boxes...

By clean I mean not only cleaning out before every new stabling of animals - this should be a matter of course - but cleaning with the steam jet with 90° on the surface, as far as the location of the box and the season anyhow allow it. If the farm has a quarantine igloo available, this should always be done.

In my experience, the use of chemical disinfectants without appropriate cleaning is pointless; after cleaning, it is an option which, however, is connected with the formation of resistance in the remaining pathogens. For many years, I have therefore been recommending the use of Effective Microorganisms following appropriate cleaning. In this way a clean environment can be achieved on the one hand and a balanced germ flora on the other, which prevents the explosion of resistant germs.

**Herbal prophylaxis to make stabling easier**

As mentioned earlier, stress during transport alone leads to a massive reduction in the body's own defence system.

If one supports the animals from the day of the stalling-in immediately, from the first feeding or drinking with immune-strengthening herbs, one can avoid the illnesses to be expected in many cases or weaken their course. For this purpose there exist herbal mixtures which are composed of different European and Indian herbs and which all have anti-inflammatory and immune-strengthening effects. These include, for example, the coneflower, the rose hip, but also the Holy Basil, Amla or Guduchi and many others. If the herbal mixtures are then also mixed with high-quality bentonite, free radicals are additionally bound in the intestines.

Such fortified calves need neither an antibiotic injection on the day of arrival, nor 1-2 weeks of antibiotics over the feed.

When using antibiotic substances, it must always be taken into account that they are ineffective against viruses and not only the pathogen is eliminated, but also there is a massive disruption of the entire intestinal flora. Now that it is known that the regeneration of the so-called intestinal microbion after antibiotic therapy can take up to six months and therefore the immune defence of an animal treated in this way is weakened in the long term, alternatives should always be considered.

The two most common problems after stalling-in are either diarrhoea or bronchitis, or pneumonia. Diarrhoea in calves can usually be stabilized very quickly by appropriate herbal mixtures, tannin-rich plants such as oak bark, black tea, chestnut bark, etc. are used as well as various Indian plants, which have a calming effect on the intestinal activity. Diarrhoea can often be avoided by carefully changing the feed.

This is more difficult with coughing, since the calves are often unloaded with considerable respiratory problems. Not infrequently they have also been sick and treated at the farm of origin.

In the cold season, it is therefore advisable, even if only the slightest cough can be heard, to immediately add herbs that have an effect on the respiratory tract to the food or drink, together with the herbs that strengthen the immune system. Plants such as thyme, horseradish primrose and again a variety of Indian medicinal plants come into question. With 7g/animal/day per mixture one has a good prophylactic dosage. In case of illness, this dosage can also be increased temporarily. Only in case of highly feverish diseases of single animals additional treatment is necessary.

More and more fatteners are also susceptible to the accompanying homeopathic treatment of their cattle. However, homeopathy has to be dealt with and a veterinarian has to acquire the knowledge and application over a long period of time. In the optimal case however the health of the cattle can be supported thereby substantially and so the necessity of a treatment requiring waiting time can be reduced again. Herbal prophylaxis and homeopathy can be combined very effectively.

More and more fattening farms are converting to this proven system.

Feedback from farm managers shows uniformity:

The amount of antibiotics used prophylactically is reduced by 80%.

The number of individual livestock treatments required is reduced by 60-70%.

The livestock grows better - the growth depression after stalling-in can be avoided.

The daily increases in weight can be slightly increased and the overall mast length can be slightly shortened.

The calves have a shiny coat and are less susceptible to diseases like trychophytia.

Despite the herbal costs, the costs for medication and a veterinarian are reduced to less than half.

In summary, it must be said that, especially in fattening, it makes sense to reconsider the routinely use of antibiotics right from the start and to avoid them as far as possible. Numerous examples have shown that it can be done better and cheaper otherwise.