

INTRODUCTION

Proper dairy heifer management from birth to 10-12 weeks of age is essential for minimizing calf mortality, achieving acceptable weight gains and stimulating rumen development.



The health and vigor of a calf at birth depends mostly on the nutrition of the cow 60 days before birth, when the developing calf gains 70% of its birth weight. Cows that are properly fed and immunized against harmful pathogens produce higher quality colostrum when the calf is born. Again, colostrum is the first milk a cow produces after calving. Calves are born without a functioning immune system, so the importance of feeding the calf colostrum at birth cannot be over emphasized. Colostrum supplies the calf with antibodies it needs to stay healthy from the start.

Provide Quality Colostrum To Aid In Disease Resistance.

- 2-3 quarts as soon as possible after birth.
- 2-3 quarts 12 hours later.
- Continue to feed colostrum for 2 more days (3 days total).

FEEDING CALVES

A calf's rumen does not start functioning normally until she is about 60 days old. This makes it necessary to feed a young calf milk or milk replacer. A calf that is bottle fed milk will activate the esophageal groove when it lifts its head up and begins sucking, which diverts milk from the rumen into the omasum and abomasum. This is why bottle feeding is preferable over bucket feeding at that early age. High quality, clean water should be offered to all calves, even during the liquid feeding stage, to improve growth and dry matter intake

Feed High Quality Milk-Replacer Or Good Quality Unmarketable Milk From Day Four Until Weaning.

- Unmarketable milk is nutritious for calves but may contain bacteria that are harmful to young calves. **Use With Caution!**
- Good quality milk-replacers may be as nutritious for calves as unmarketable milk and minimizes risk of milk-borne disease.
- Feeding 3 quarts twice daily of approximately 12-13% solids (whole milk).
- Feed one 1.2-1.4lbs of milk-replacer per calf per day (milk powder). It is critically important that milk and milk replacer are fed at 102 degrees F (mixed at 120 degrees F). No milk/milk replacer should be fed under 100 degrees F.
- At less than one week of age provide a good quality nutritionally balanced calf starter (texturized).

CALF STARTER

Offer a small amount of calf starter beginning at one day of age. A calf starter is a feed that includes pellets and corn and can be drizzled with molasses to make it appealing for the calf to eat. She might not eat it right away but keep a fresh, clean offering of starter available to her at all times.



WEANING

Weaning is the process of taking a calf off of milk, and transitioning her to water and dry feed (calf Starter). This usually occurs when a calf is 8 weeks old. Weaning should take place when the calf is eating about 2-3 pounds of starter a day. At approximately 7-14 days after removing milk and when calves are consuming 4 -5 lbs of starter, they may be moved from individual hutches to small group pens. If possible, group calves by size to ensure their specific nutritional needs are met and to prevent bullying.