



NURTURING THE YOUNG CALF

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During the first 90 days of life calves should reach 15% of their mature body weight. And in the first 60 days they should double their birth weight.

Action starts at birth, with the newborn calf getting its first feed of high quality colostrum within two hours and more than 150g of immunoglobulins (IgG) in the first 24 hours. The calf relies on this as a springboard to a healthy start.

Introducing a quality milk replacer maintains growth rates, providing concentrations and quantities are correct. Five or six litres a day, in two feeds, is recommended.

It's worth checking concentration rates. A litre of milk at 12.5% concentration means 125g of milk powder in 875ml of water and NOT 125g of powder in a litre of water, which would give a concentration of 11.1%.

Encouraging rumen development immediately after the colostrum phase is vital if growth rates are going to be maintained. A high quality calf starter and fresh water will encourage intakes, providing milk replacer rates are not exceeded so suppressing the calf's interest in dry feed.

Cargill trials have shown that a modified accelerated programme, that accurately balances quantities of milk replacer and dry feed, will maximise growth rates alongside rumen development and help to maintain linear growth rates both pre and post weaning.

Too often producers are encouraged to drive for higher pre-weaning weight gains by feeding more milk. Current research shows that exceeding 750g/calf/day of milk replacer delays rumen development and reduces starter feed digestion by between 6% and 9% dry matter. This compromises post-weaning growth rates as calves face a more abrupt and stressful change in diet at weaning, resulting in a growth check. The benefits of extra growth from the milk replacer are soon lost.

Intakes of dry feed should be between 1.5kg and 2kg a day by weaning, with the volume of milk replacer at the same concentration but reduced to one feed a day of three litres in the week before weaning. Good quality straw will also help rumen development.

Calves on this modified accelerated feeding programme are well equipped to increase concentrate intake post weaning to between 2.5kg and 3kg. Supported with good management and a healthy environment, these calves should be on course to meet their 90-day growth target.

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