



GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR CALVES...

Young stock rearing is the second highest cost on most dairy farms after feed, so we thought it would be good to look at what you can do to drive calf growth, minimising overall rearing costs and maximising lifetime performance.

Focus on the pre-weaning period...

Achieving high growth rates in young calves is key – the feed conversion efficiency in pre-weaning calves means that this is the most cost-effective growth you can get. Aim for calves to double their birth weight by weaning at 8-10 weeks of age. For a 45kg calf at birth, this requires a growth rate of 0.80 kg per day to reach a weaning weight of 90 kg after 8 weeks. Ideally, weigh calves at birth and then from time to time during the pre-weaning period, so you know what growth rates you are achieving.

Colostrum – quality, quantity, quickly

Probably the most important part of calf management is getting quality colostrum into calves quickly and in the correct quantity. Aim to test colostrum and only feed colostrum with more than 50g/litre of IgG at a rate of 10 per cent of the calf's bodyweight within 4 hours after birth, to achieve a minimum of 10g/litre of

IgG in the calf's plasma by 24hrs after birth (this gives a typical feed rate of 4-5 litres). Don't let calves suckle their mother, as there is considerable evidence that there is heightened risk of contamination with pathogens at a time when calves are most vulnerable, and you have no idea how much colostrum has been consumed.

Water and hydration

The importance of water can sometimes be overlooked, but it is an essential nutrient and fresh, clean drinking water should be available from birth in addition to milk or milk replacer. Not only will this support good rumen and microbiome development, adequate consumption of water can increase growth by up to 38%. Aim for calves to drink 1L/day in their first week and nearly 3L/day by 3-4 weeks old, and maintain temperature at 16-18°C in cold weather.

Milk replacer

It is important to promote high rates of daily gain with milk replacer early in life but also not to over-feed as it can reduce or delay starter feed intakes, which are vital for rumen development.

Contact us...

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“Since adding Actisaf and Safmannan to our milk replacer, the calves appear much healthier and intakes are good from birth, and we’ve seen no further cases of calf scour, which can only be a good thing. Changes to the calf diet, coupled with closer management and improved housing, have seen us bring our age at first calving down to 23 months.”

Dan Evans, Little Hook Farm, Pembrokeshire



of digestibility and degradability), high quality protein (with good levels of UDP) and low digestible fibre. In addition, current recommendations are to feed a source of forage as 4 per cent of total solid feed intake, chopped to 2.5cm and containing > 65 per cent NDF (e.g. chopped hay or straw) as this promotes muscular development of the rumen thereby facilitating higher intakes of starter feed. A source of chopped forage will also aid rumination which will contribute to raising rumen pH above pH 6.0.

Weaning

The weaning process should start when the calf is approximately 45 days old and should involve gradually reducing the volume of milk fed daily, which should promote increased intake of starter feed. A typical recommendation is to wean Holstein calves once they are consuming 2 kg of starter feed per head per day for three consecutive days. If calves are housed individually during the pre-weaning period, they should be group housed in small batches of 7 to 10 pre-weaning to ease weaning stress and encourage group feeding of starter feed.

With forage availability under pressure on many farms this winter, and the focus being on ensuring diets for lactating cows aren't compromised, it may be that once calves are weaned they are left with diets that will maintain them but might not really drive performance.

Of course, if you don't have enough fodder, then decisions have to be made about which livestock to prioritise with what you've got. But failing to get heifers grown to calve at between 22 and 24 months of age will increase overall rearing costs and impact on lifetime performance. As such, whilst it might seem costly to buy in additional feed if silage is short, expenditure on young stock feed in the short term will probably still pay for itself overall. Feeding straw plus concentrate diets maybe the only option for certain farms and this is a very viable option, however, concentrate protein levels, as well as mineral and vitamin supplementation, need to be considered if following this approach.

Aim to feed 6 litres of milk per calf per day, containing 125g – 150 g of milk powder/litre. As an easy rule of thumb, provide 1.5 per cent of bodyweight as solids during the first week of life, increasing to 2 per cent of bodyweight from the second week of life until the week before weaning, when one feeding is dropped.

Starter feed intake and chopped forages

It is vital to promote early intake of starter feed to physically and microbially develop the rumen so that the animal can start to digest fibre as soon as possible. Fresh starter feed should be fed daily and target 300g of starter feed intake by 3 weeks of age, of a feed that contains >32 per cent starch (from balanced sources

MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY BITE

With the cost of bought-in feed rising, every bite counts when it comes to milk production and profitability.

Actisaf® Sc 47 live yeast is scientifically proven to support rumen function and drive feed efficiency in even the highest performing cows.

Research has shown that feeding Actisaf at 10 grams per cow per day delivers up to **5.9% more energy corrected milk** from the same amount of feed - without affecting cow health, fertility or body condition.

Adding **Actisaf® live yeast** to your dairy ration can **return up to 8x your investment**, and improving feed efficiency is key to delivering improved environmental sustainability. Can you afford not to use Actisaf this winter?

ActiSaf^{Sc 47}

Learn more at
www.yeastolutions.co.uk
or call us at 028 9334 3900.

Feeding Actisaf and Safmannan delivers benefits...

Including Actisaf Sc47 protected live yeast in the ration provides significant benefits to calves during the pre-weaning stage. Through its mode of action, Actisaf reduces trace oxygen in the rumen and creates an environment where the main cellulolytic bacteria will grow and thrive, thereby improving fibre digestion when it is already challenged by low pH in the developing rumen and enhancing the development of the core ruminal microbiome, setting the animal up for a productive lifetime.

Actisaf, included with the starter feed, also eases the transition on to dry feed, as it conditions the rumen microbes for the change in diet by biologically buffering the rumen and promoting a higher rumen pH through the stimulation of lactic acid-utilising bacteria. These bacteria reduce the build up of lactic acid in the calf's rumen, which reduces the incidence of digestive upsets such as acidosis, which can greatly impact on feed digestion, as well as increasing the production of the primary glucose precursor propionate which is the key driver of live weight gain.

Feeding Safmannan, which is a premium yeast cell wall, can prove beneficial to calf performance, and is particularly pertinent with the increasing focus surrounding antibiotic usage and subsequent resistance in calves. Bouts of calf diarrhoea and respiratory disease such as pneumonia in the first 3 months of life have been shown to reduce growth rates and to be detrimental to first and subsequent lactation yield of heifers when they enter the milking herd. Therefore, management and nutrition of the calf early on in life has long term implications and performance in the first three months of life can have a major bearing on first lactation performance of the heifer in the milking herd.

Safmannan is manufactured from unique strains of yeast under extremely consistent manufacturing conditions. Beta glucans and mannans - the functional properties of Safmannan - support the immune status of calves, thereby strengthening its defence mechanism to challenges.

These functional properties of Safmannan also bind to pathogenic bacteria, thereby reducing the load of harmful bacteria in the lower gut, which can cause disease.

“Our heifers have an average age of 23 months at first calving. We have given Actisaf and Safmannan to over 500 heifer calves in the last two years, and with success like this I feel it represents a good value as a part of our rearing strategy.”

Mike Smith, Pelcomb Farm, Pembrokeshire



“We want our calves to get the best start possible, so we supplement calves on milk with Actisaf and Safmannan to get them going so they can thrive in their early months. They do very well on it!”

Nevin & Stephen Greenaway, Co Armagh

