

DIVISION OF RESEARCH & EXTENSION

Feeding Dairy Calves Up to Weaning

Healthy Calves for Healthy Herd

Calves are the future of any dairy enterprise. Their health is very important so as to have a better replacement stock in the heard. To have healthy cows, one must feed calves properly from birth to weaning time. Weaning is the time when the calf stops feeding on milk and become fully dependent on other feed sources.



Calf suckling the mother

Why Calf Feeding is Important

Feeding of calves ensures that they remain healthy, grow fast into replacement heifers and start production early. If not fed well, they become weak, have slow growth rate and easily become sick. Therefore, proper feeding of calves will contribute to a strong take-off in your stock, healthy cows, high milk production, lower treatment costs and result in the overall growth of your farm.

How to Feed your Calf from Birth

1. As soon as the calf is born, feed her on the mother's milk within 1 to 2 hours of birth, latest 24 hours.
2. Week one: Allow her to suckle the mother, assisted by directing the mouth towards the udder.
3. Week two: Feed her on colostrum for about 4-5 days. You can also feed her on whole milk which is clean and warm at body temperature of 37°C or milk replacer. Feed these at 10 % body weight or about 4 litres per day in at least two feedings. Use nipple suckling, bottle feeding or introduce early bucket feeding.
4. Week three: Between 2-3 weeks of age, introduce high quality roughage together with concentrates preferably calf starter pellets.
5. Six weeks of age: Reduce the amount of milk and encourage the calf to consume dry feeds including the concentrates until weaning time.



Pellets getting introduced

Provide fresh water alongside daily milk. Lack of drinking water slows down the digestion process and rumen development thereby lengthening the time for safe weaning. Increase water intake with age and after sometime leave water free access.

Weaning

Normally occurs when calf is twice the birth weight, mostly at about 9-12 weeks of age. Early weaning is possible if more milk is fed and introducing pre-starter and starter feeds early in life. Weaning should be gradual to reduce stress on calves, for instance, reducing the twice a day milk feeding to once a day to allow her adjust to the new diet.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Extension)

dvcre@egerton.ac.ke ; www.egerton.ac.ke

Egerton University is ISO 9001 : 2008 certified