



## Calf Rearing Fact Sheet

# Why targets, benefits of weighing

### Key Points

1. Set live weight targets specific to the cows in your farm system.
2. Setting targets allows you to know what you are aiming for to ensure optimal cow performance.
3. Setting targets and monitoring progress means you can be proactive in making sure you achieve targets.
4. Weighing is more accurate than either weigh band or 'eye-o-meter'.

### General

- Setting targets in the context of this fact sheet involves identifying goals for the live weight of dairy animals at a specific time or age.
- Within the dairy industry, targets are often referred to as a percentage of mature live weight. Mature live weight is significantly affected by breed but also varies between farms and farm systems.
- Know the mature live weight of your herd and then establish target live weights for stock starting at 10-12 weeks.
- To establish the mature live weight of your herd either weigh 10% of your 6-8 year olds in Dec/Jan (Spring calving herd) or use the following formula:-

$$\text{Expected mature live weight} = 503 + \text{Live Weight Breeding Value}$$

Note—Live Weight Breeding Value can be obtained from your herd improvement organisation.

- Monitoring progress towards established targets is important as it allows you to have confidence that you will arrive at the destination (Mature live weight) on time and reap the benefits OR be alerted early on and be able to take remedial action to get back on track.
- See Farm Fact Sheet on setting targets 4.2 and on.
- Scales are by far the best option for weighing calves, however weigh bands are certainly a big improvement on an imprecise 'eye-o-meter'.



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- Visually assessing live weight is unreliable. Calves can be healthy, have a shiny coat and appear to be doing all the right things except growing at the required rate to achieve targets.
- Poukawa weighed 500 calves and compared their weight and girth measurements with a commercially available weigh band. The commercial weigh band used was not a good predictor of weight and had obviously been calibrated from weaner beef calves and extrapolated back to lighter (dairy calf) weights.
- Ideally heifers should be weighed every month or bimonthly.
- Target weights are the weights to be achieved by **ALL individuals**. It is not an average of the group.