

Contracts crucial for 'odd' calves

Rearers should only raise poorly marked Friesian or Jersey-cross calves if they know they can on-sell them, says Poukawa Dairy Beef Project research manager Paul Muir.

"Unless you have a contract or an outlet for them, taking on light weight, poorly marked or late calves to fill the shed is likely to cost you money," Muir told farmers at the first Poukawa roadshow seminar of the season at Waipukurau last month.

Muir says calves are bought and sold on the basis of coat colour. Straight Friesian bull calves are sought after and others, particularly Jersey-cross calves, are discounted.

However, a study of the weight gain performance of groups of straight Friesian bull calves and a similar group of mixed breed or odd-coloured calves of the same start weight (44kg) showed little difference in the performance.

The two groups were bought from Tuakau saleyards in autumn 2000, farmed together and slaughtered at 21 months of age.

Carcase weight for the well-marked Friesian calves was 6kg heavier than the other group. "Once again, this indicates that the level of prejudice against non-Friesian is not warranted and that their performance is only slightly behind that of similar sized, well marked Friesian calves," Muir says.

"Until that prejudice breaks down, rearers should only rear poorly marked and Jersey-cross calves if they know they can on-sell them," he says.

"You're better to source on weight and frame, not coat colour. But you do need to factor in that prejudice if you have to on-sell those calves."

Muir also reinforced the message about buying calves with a minimum liveweight on delivery of 40kg.

"In our experience, calves will lose up to 3.5% of the bodyweight on a long journey. For the calves we've been buying at Poukawa, they have been losing about 1.5kg on a truck journey of 6-8 hours."

"Calves do not lose 5kg on a journey of that length."

Calf buyers who don't have scales can use a girth measure to assess calf weights. Muir says a girth measure of 78cm just behind the front legs equates to about a 40kg calf.



The well-marked Friesian calves were only 6kg heavier at slaughter than the poorly-marked Friesian or Jersey-cross calves.

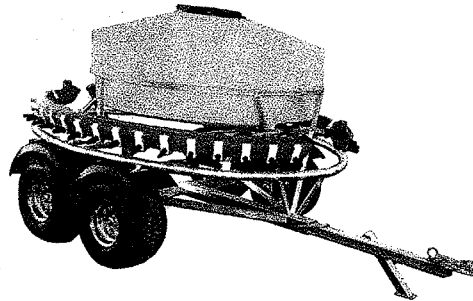
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