

# Rearer questions budgets

Experienced calf rearer Dick Carter is questioning the publication of advance calf rearing budgets by organisations like the Poukawa Project.

"Unfortunately, the most published calf rearing budget used in these publications is the Poukawa No.4 system which does not show all the actual costs of calf rearing, and therefore distorts the true costs of producing weaner calves," Carter says.

This year's newsletter was published in June and contains what Carter calls an incomplete budget.

"The Poukawa budget (calf rearing costs and margins

model) speculates this season's rearing costs to be \$178.70 excluding the calf purchase price and the rearers margin."

"But that assumes that all calves that have not died are sold for the final budget price. Every calf rearer knows, as does any farmer with a beef herd or flock of sheep, that there are always tail-enders, animals that for some reason or other, do not grow as well as others."

Carter says his own experiences with calf rearing suggest that 85% of calves grow as expected and 15% do not.

• Continued on p41.



Early colostrum is crucial for healthy calf rearing. Tube feeding of colostrum is one way to ensure calves receive that vital early feed.

# calf

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## Colostrum crucial says large scale calf rearer

One of the largest calf rearers in the country is stressing the importance of early colostrum for building calf immunity against sickness and disease.

Former dairy farmers, Helen and Eric Pidduck rear 5000 dairy beef calves a year, including 1500 autumn calves, on their Hamilton property.

Helen Pidduck says they noticed a massive increase in calf losses last spring. At the same time they were aware that increasing numbers of dairy farmers were opting to sell their early colostrum to the dairy companies.

"The calves were still getting colostrum but obviously it didn't have the quality of what they were sending to the factory."

She hopes this season that will change because of new rules that dairy farmers can only supply colostrum from the first three milkings. Also some farmers who sold their early colostrum last season have noticed an increase in health problems with their heifer replacements.

Helen Pidduck says they have spoken to all of their calf suppliers about the necessity of giving calves at least 2 litres of colostrum, within a few hours after birth.

They have also conducted tests on calves they purchased. In autumn they

were concerned that "far too many calves from one farmer supplier were ending up in their "hospital" pen. They paid \$12/calf for the Midland quick test kit which requires taking a small sample of blood from the calf which is then measured for its immunoglobulin type g (IgG) levels. The IgG's carried in early colostrum are absorbed into the calf's bloodstream and transfer passive immunity from disease.

"We tested five, out of about 100 calves from that farm, and they all showed no level of immunity at all."

Helen Pidduck says the dairy farm which supplied the calves was keen to know why they were also having trouble rearing their replacements.

"They were very cooperative and changed their system so they were leaving the calves on the cows for 12 hours and making sure they received colostrums and the later calves we bought from them were fine."

She says the impact of low immunity is long term and calves that don't receive sufficient colostrum struggle to catch up to the weight gains of their peers.

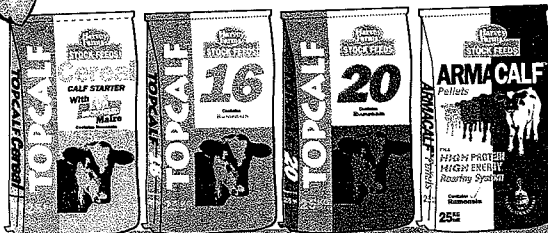
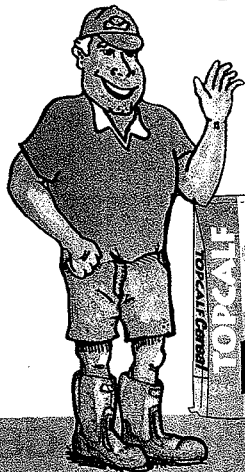
"A lot of people are hung up with sanitary conditions for calves, but these animals want to be well and if they have a good start on that first day they will shrug off bugs."

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