

Calves must be 40kg minimum at purchase

Buy calves that are at least 40kg liveweight has always been the advice of the Poukawa Calf Project team.

Although there will always be some calves lighter than 40kg, it is the calves under 35kg on arrival that are unacceptable. Not only do these calves tend to have more problems but also they never catch up.

Little data is available on birth weights of Friesian calves. The Poukawa team weighed 165 newly born calves on four farms in the Waikato and found that they averaged 38.2kg. The range in birth weights was from 24.5kg to 48.5kg.

When the lightest 20% was removed, the average weight increased to 39.8kg. Calves at Poukawa are generally weighed "straight off the truck" and 1334 spring born Friesian calves bought in over the past few seasons have averaged 43.7kg.

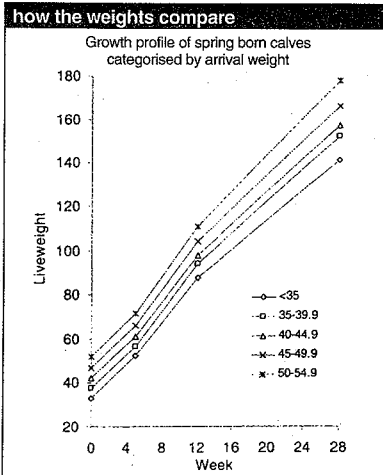
Poukawa has split the data from 1334 spring Friesian calves into weight categories to look at the impact of their arrival weight on subsequent performance. The difference in average weight of calves under 35kg and calves between 45kg and 50kg was 13.7kg on arrival, 16.5kg at 12 weeks and 25kg at 28 weeks of age (see graph).

Lighter calves were fed an extra week longer than the heavier calves and consumed another 2.7kg of milk replacer.

This increases the cost of rearing these lighter calves and undoubtedly prevented them from slipping further behind their heavier counterparts at 12 weeks of age. Calves that were between 35kg and 40kg when they arrived were only 94kg at 12 weeks of age. With less calves likely to be reared this year, there will be more calves to select from.

Poukawa advises buying four-day-old calves on a weight basis. Heavier calves are always going to be worth more as bobbies and are going to hit their targets earlier once reared.

Conversely, smaller calves are definitely worth less. Data collected on 280 bobby calves slaughtered at two processing plants demonstrates there is a 50% dressing out percentage for bobby calves, irrespective of liveweight.



A 35kg bobby calf will dress out at 17.5kg and on current prices of \$1.50/kg this places its value as a bobby at \$26.25.

On the other hand, a 45kg bobby calf will dress out at 22.5kg and at \$2.00/kg will be worth \$45.00.

Finishers insist on 100kg calves and pay more for heavier and less for lighter calves - why not rearers, Poukawa project leader Paul Muir asks?

Scales are by far the best option for weighing calves. However weigh bands are certainly a big improvement on the 'eye-o-meter'.

In 1997 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 calculated from weaner beef calves and extrapolated back to lighter weights.

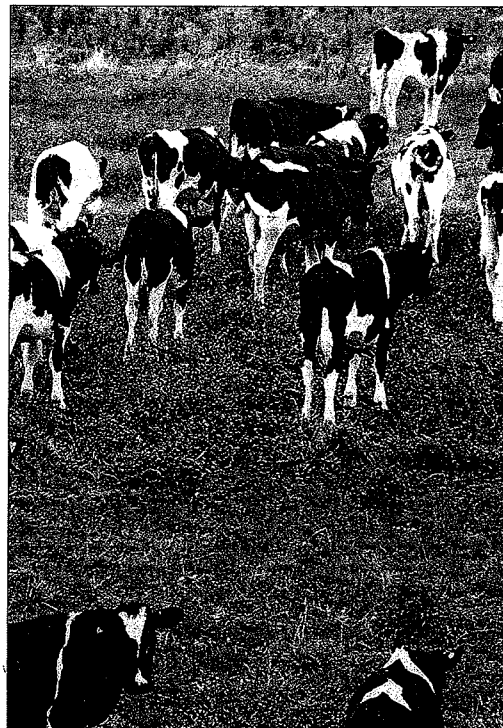
Coat colour and calf markings are an unreliable way of picking how a calf will perform later in life.

The dairy herd is now quite mixed. Only 54% of the dairy herd is Holstein-Friesian and in 2001/02 only 54% of these cows were inseminated with Holstein-Friesian semen.

After a number of trials we believe that the best way to select calves is on weight and frame size.

The colour of its coat will have no impact on how it grows. Nevertheless there is still huge prejudice amongst finishers. Until this prejudice breaks down, rearers should only rear poorly marked and crossbred calves if they know they can on-sell them.

With the bull schedule falling below that of the steer schedule, castration of calves may become a more popular option.



By 28 weeks of age, calves that were between 45 and 50kg liveweight on arrival weighed 28kg more than those under 35kg on arrival. Aim over 40kg is the advice from the Poukawa team.

Healthy start ensur

Newborn calves are ensured a healthy start to life due to a starter feed formula - Gusto Calf Blend Junior - developed by Allied Grain for calves up to four weeks old.

The new feed offers young calves a higher protein and whey content - essential elements for the good health of young stomachs.

Ken Jones, managing director of Allied Grain, says increased demand by farmers requesting a food supplement aimed specifically at newborns led to the development of the new product, Gusto Calf Blend Junior.

Farmers found their calves liked the original Gusto Calf Blend and wanted something along the same lines that gave newborns a good healthy foundation to build on.

Jones says young calves have a tendency to be fussy eaters. With this in mind, Calf Blend Junior has been developed to be similar in appearance to the original Calf Blend.

Blend, ensuring smooth transition blends.

Allied Grain worked closely with Sue Macky and Brian MacK Production Systems in Te Anau in developing the product to ensure it meets the needs of young calves. The product is effective and contains essential elements for the good health of young stomachs. The new product has been fortified with a high quality whey-based milk which helps in the formulation of the calf's stomach, aiding digestion.

"We've even added a vanilla flavour called Saroline to keep the calves happy", says Jones.

"Our blend suits the needs of the farmer. Animals like it and it for those two reasons," he says.

"We are after all farmers and we understand what farmers need for."

More? Ken Jones, Allied Grain, 0800 262 493.

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- ✓ All Milk Blend — Includes colostrum powder