

# Care needed for non-curdling powders

Non-curdling calf milk replacers (CMRs) are a higher risk feed alternative to curdling powders for calves between four days and 14 days of age, says a calf rearing expert.

Paul Muir, On-Farm Research, says use of non-curdling CMRs "takes rearers into a higher risk zone" when dealing with new arrivals in a calf rearing facility.

After 14 days of age, Muir says the risks associated with feeding non-curdling CMRs lessen with calf age provided the normal hygiene and animal health requirements are up to scratch.

Whey-based CMRs and some batches of the more traditional casein-based CMRs do not curdle inside the gut of

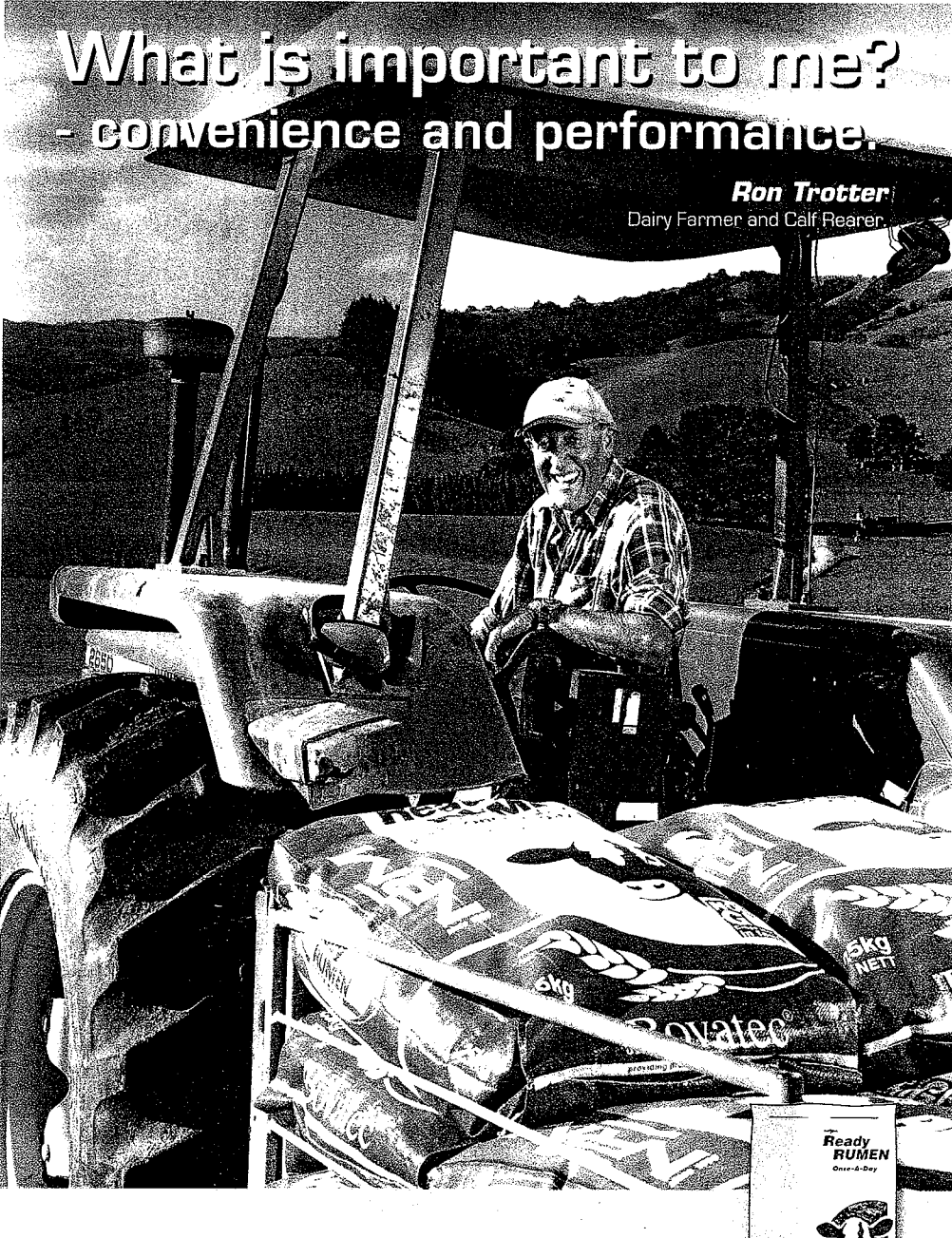
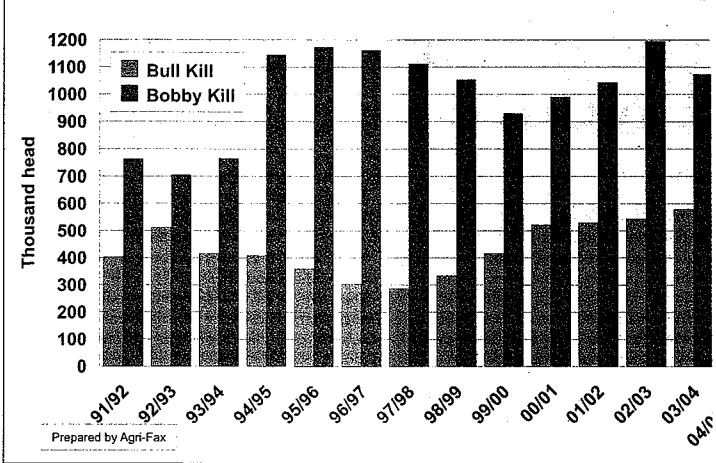
calves. Muir says calf rearers buying casein-based powders should test the curdling status of each batch of powder they use.

On-Farm Research's annual calf rearing newsletter, available this year in early July, includes a curd testing recipe.

Muir says this year's newsletter will also include information relating to trial work carried out last spring comparing whey and casein based powders.

On-Farm Research has an extensive newsletter database built up over the past five years. Anyone wishing to have their name added to the list is asked to either phone (06) 874 8757 or email paul@on-farm.co.nz.

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- convenience and performance.

Ron Trotter  
Dairy Farmer and Calf Rearer

# Expert call for fixed calf margin

A calf rearing expert is calling for co-operation between dairy farmers, finishers to avoid rearer margin squeeze. Paul Muir, On-Farm Research, says there more certainty in the return for rearing calves each level in the beef production cycle must to co-operate.

"A lot of rearers were burnt again last year. Early predictions that calves suitable would cost rearers about \$80-\$90, but they finished up being more like \$130-\$140."

Prices for 100kg liveweight calves average \$350/head, meaning less than \$200/head the rearing costs and provide a return for capital.

"Rearers are getting sick and tired of buying prices and selling at wholesale prices to find their calves reach 100kg liveweight."

"I believe there is scope for more fixed prices. We need more certainty in that rearing margin would be good for the whole industry."

Muir says rearers with scale and "deep pockets" the capacity to extract economies of scale can achieve acceptable returns on their rearing. At the other end of the scale are lifestyle breeders who are prepared to rear small numbers for a margin.

"It's a tough game to be in year after year."

"But there's always another group of people entering the rearing business for the first time to it after a few years off. That is what creates the squeeze for calves and puts the squeeze on margins."

Muir says he would prefer to see finishers take a stake in the rearing phase by offering to rear calves.

"I think there's a strong case for more of the risk associated with rearing to be shared by finishers. A margin of say \$250 would provide an adequate return for rearers, over and above their costs."

Muir is forecasting strong calf prices this spring on lower calf numbers coming forward because of low dairy cow conception rates last spring.

"Who knows? We may have high calf prices many reared this spring. It's always difficult to predict the underlying demand for four-day-old calves at the end of the season."

If calf prices do hold up strongly and demand against buying their usual numbers, Muir says the potential for beef production to slip in 2007.

"However, there are other ways to produce beef."