



ates waste, which is why careful monitoring of individual calves is part of their calf rearing business near Pahiatua.

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and more straight Friesians."

Until last year they collected all their calves with a ute and trailer, this year a transport company will be used. About half their calves last year were bought at sales and the rest privately. Some were Friesian Hereford-cross calves for use in another part of their business.

They have shied away from that particular cross because they are sought after with a high price, reducing their margin.

The Hulls take the calves to 100kg for selling on the October market but some are kept for their own bull finishing unit. Neal says they have pre-sold 300 100kg calves already.

When the calves arrive they are weighed and tagged, navel sprayed and given a general check over. This is recorded on the calf record.

Neal says if a calf is not sound he will target a discount rather than return it.

"You've got to get it right the first time," he says. "It is a tough industry and you've got to be on the button to make good margins," says Neal.

The Hulls house the calves in pens of 12 with 1.9m² each.

From the day they arrive they have Harvey Farms Top Calf 20 pellets available and measured out at about 0.5kg/calf.

"This gives them a taste and gets them going."

Calves are encouraged onto the pellets by finger feeding. Neal says when a calf has finished its milk they still readily suck, providing a good opportunity for the calf handlers to get them onto pellets.

The pens also have good quality straw and fresh water topped up every day.

The pens are lined with bedding bark, but they are investigating other permanent options because it is becoming hard to get as mills are starting to strip logs of bark in the forest and it is used for gardening and by vineyards too.

"It used to be a by-product, now it's valuable."

It was too early for Neal to reveal the options they are looking into.

They feed straw rather than hay because it promotes more rumen development.

"Straw snaps into the rumen and encourages gut development."

He budgets on about one conventional straw bale to get a calf to 100kg.

The calves are fed once a day with 2L of whole milk powder based replacer. Neal says they use the once a day feeding system because it provides a concentrated formula ideal for rumen development rather than developing the abomasum. Good rumen development means calves can be weaned off milk quicker and start gaining weight earlier.

He says a calf with a very potty tummy is typically a sign of an underdeveloped rumen.

"It works for us and this is our seventh year," he says.

"When our calves leave the property at 100kg they look like small adult bulls.

Stallion feeder and it is while feeding the calves are carefully scrutinized for any signs of ill health. These feeders mean calf milk intake can be accurately measured as each compartment holds 2L.

Two calf handlers work their way down each side of the shed with a feeder each.

They have three dedicated staff to rear the calves. Daughter Becca and two other staff members are employed between July and December. Two feed the milk and the third tops up meal, straw and fresh water.

On average the feeding and jobs in the shed are done between 9am and 12.30pm. The calves are checked again in the evening and water and meal topped up if needed.

Neal says every day the calf handlers look for swollen joints, scours or navel infections and while it sounds time consuming the careful monitoring of each calf is paying dividends.

After the first feed of milk the calves are supplemented with 1mm of Biostart to help coagulate the milk, which also aids rumen development, and gut health.

Neal says once a day feeding works for them and helps encourage calves onto pellets sooner. He says the concentrated feed provides enough goodness for the calves and also helps save time.

By the time the calves head outside at seven weeks old he calculates they are eating more than 3kg of pellets each a day.

Neal believes some calves will be eating more, but it's difficult to monitor.

Once the calves move outside they are fed with Top Calf 16 pellets and given about 2kg/head/day before they are gradually weaned off at 12 weeks old.

When it comes to colostrum intake he says there is no guarantee a calf has suckled it off the cow. He does become anxious when conditions are wet and muddy because this is when dairy farmers are more likely to take the calf off the cow early.

He has had colostrum tests conducted before, which is the only way to tell if calves have had it. He says a lack of colostrum would be the cause of most calf deaths in his rearing business.

Part of the monitoring programme includes regular weighing of the calves. On average they are weighed up to five times while housed in the shed and at least twice outside.

Weighing is critical because it provides an insight into how well the calves are performing.

The Hulls are happy with weight gain of 1kg/day but say they have calves that can gain up to 1.4kg/day.

"Getting a calf quicker to 100kg is a cost saving."

When the calves are moved outside the family conducts faecal egg monitoring for parasite burdens about once a month. They are treated with a combination pour-on drench, Eclipse, that lasts until weaning.

Neal says the faecal egg monitoring is critical to the success of the pour-on which they are very happy with so far. This is the second year they will use it.

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Rotavirus dominates scours outbreaks

Rotavirus continues to be the dominant cause of calf scours, according to MAF's Surveillance magazine.

A report from Gribbles Veterinary Pathology in Palmerston North showed that at one point last spring, 85% of cases had one or more samples positive for rotavirus.

Some farms had cryptosporidia along with rotavirus within the same group of calves, with multiple infections including salmonellosis occasionally reported in some individual animals.

The report said that the worst cases were characterised by dysentery, dehydration and rapid death, with severe inflammation and ulceration of the small intestines.

Schering-Plough Coopers Veterinary Adviser Roger Marchant says Rotavirus scours is an established fact of life in both dairy and beef farming.

"Rotavirus is on all properties; the virus is shed in the faeces of apparently healthy animals especially at times of high stress such as at calving. This makes newborn calves especially at risk.

"The disease incubates in just 24-28 hours so can spread very fast, and young calves will go down very quickly. Calves are most susceptible in their first three weeks of life, but in an outbreak situation and/or heavy challenge, older calves will succumb to infection."