



Calf Rearing Fact Sheet: Feeding

Weaning

Key Points

1. Base your weaning decisions on calf weights (scales are more accurate than guess work).
2. Transition calves onto clean high quality pasture once meal intake is greater than 1 kg/calf/day.
3. Calves must have access to clean water.
4. Access to shelter for young calves on pasture reduces health risks.
5. Ensure adequate meal intake prior to weaning.
6. Gradually reduce milk over a week.
7. Keep other practices the same during the process of weaning
8. Check animal health procedures—vaccination, parasites, minerals. Consult your vet if necessary.



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When to Wean

- Prior to weaning, calves need to be growing well and be on a combination of milk and meal. Weaning age will depend on the feeding system used.
- Calves on a typical high volume dairy farm system (see Fact Sheet 3.3) will have slower rumen development and need to be weaned at much heavier weights. Dairy NZ targets are 100 kg for Friesian calves, 90 kg for crossbred calves and 80 kg for Jersey calves.
- On a low volume/restricted milk (an early rumen development system - see Fact Sheet 3.4) calves will be able to be weaned a lot earlier. For example, Friesian calves can be weaned at 65 kg, crossbred calves at 60 kg and Jersey calves at 55 kg. These are minimum weights, not the average of the group. And all calves need to be eating 1 kg of meal before they are weaned. It is important to remember that if a mob of 20 calves are eating 20 kg of meal, some individuals will only be eating 0.5 kg and will not be ready for weaning. Watch out for these individuals - they will be hollow looking and noisy - and put them back onto milk.

Weaning

- Ensure pasture the calves are going onto is clean and of high quality. Often paddocks close to the rearing facility are weed infested and used for effluent.
- Plan ahead and prepare high pasture quality for calves. The aim is to encourage intake. Access to clean water is also essential.
- Access to shelter is important. If calves are introduced to pasture at an early age a sudden change in weather or lengthy periods of adverse weather increases the susceptibility to health problems like pneumonia
- Gradually reduce milk over about a week. Do not water down the milk given. The aim is to encourage the calf to replace milk with meal and/or pasture. Increase meal feeding to 2 kg/head/day. Then after 2-3 weeks, slowly reduce the meal available to 1 kg/head/day and down to 0.5 kg/head/day after 4-6 weeks. Continued feeding of small quantities of meal or crushed maize through the summer will maintain calf growth rates.
- Reduce the stress by keeping other things the same and choose your timing regards weather conditions. It is of course best to have a few fine days post-weaning.
- Once weaned calves are settled, they can either be in one mob and moved around the farm ahead of cows to ensure access to high quality pasture.
- Animal health (see Fact Sheet 2.7)