



## Calf Rearing Fact Sheet: Targets

# Bull calves

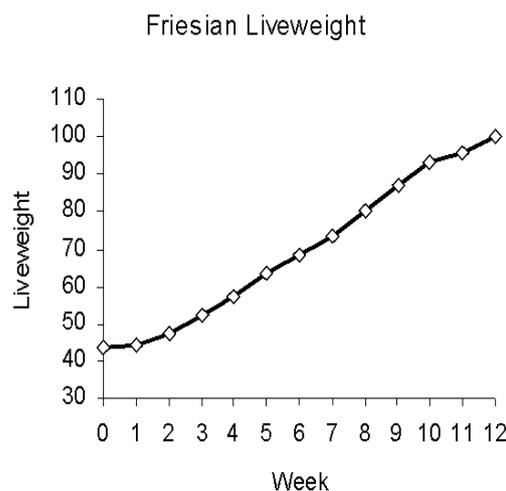
### Key Points

1. Set target growth rates.
2. Monitor live weight gain to ensure you are meeting these targets.
3. If not meeting your targets work out why you are not and fix the issue.
4. Failure to meet targets is usually because they are not eating enough quality feed or there is an underlying health issue.



### General

- Whereas dairy farmers are often seeking to grow their dairy replacements as fast as possible, bull calf rearers are often operating on tight margins.
- Bull calves are typically purchased off calf rearers at 100 kg in Nov/Dec with early calves sought after as they tend to finish earlier. Early born calves often only have to be taken through 1 winter, later born calves will generally have to be taken through 2 winters. Feeding through this second winter is expensive with associated treading damage (pugging) particularly on heavy soils.
- The target weight for a typical 40 kg calf at 4 days of age is 100 kg at 12 weeks of age. This is considered a good compromise between growth rate and cost. Whilst it is possible to achieve live weights of 100 kg some 2-3 weeks earlier than this, the input costs (milk and meal) are significantly greater.
- Monitoring will allow you to determine whether your calves are growing at the desired rate.

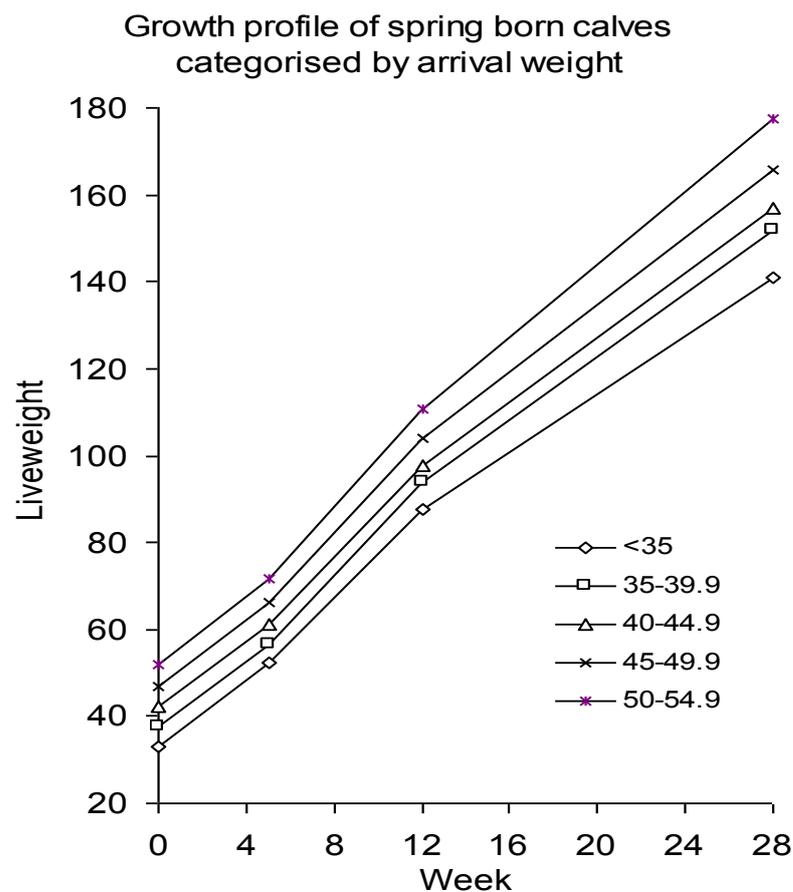


Wk	Friesian bull LWt (kg)
0	43.7
1	44.5
2	47.4
3	52.1
4	57.3
5	63.2
6	68.4
7	73.6
8	80.3
9	86.8
10	93.2
11	96.0
12	100.2

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## Factors affecting growth rate

- The more energy a calf consumes the faster it will grow. However, feeding extra milk or pellets has to be considered within the cost constraints of the system. It is important that all calves get the correct amount of milk and that any other feeds are clean and kept fresh as calves are fussy eaters.
- Birth weight: calves that are heavier at birth grow faster than smaller calves and the gap gets bigger - at least up to 28 weeks of age (see below)
- Breed: Jersey calves will grow slower than Friesian calves - this is probably due to the differences in birth weight
- Health: any health issues will reduce calf growth rate so it is important that problems are detected early and action taken
- Calves that are cold or wet will use energy to keep warm rather than be putting that energy into growth.



## Putting plans into action

- Establish target live weights for your young stock. This is an individual farm decision.
- Monitor progress. Weigh calves every second month and assess progress against targets. Keep records so that you can compare your results with previous years. Scales are more accurate than 'eye-o-meter' or weigh band.
- It is important that all bulls reach target - it is not a group average.
- Weigh at a similar time of day, preferably in the morning to minimise the effect of gut fill.
- If targets are not being achieved take action - if necessary preferentially feed lighter bulls.
- If targets are consistently not achieved review the animal health status of bulls—in particular review the parasite control programme and mineral status of heifers.