

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 29th January 2021

What Milk and Concentrates Should be in the Diet of the Calf?

As part of the Animal Health Ireland & Teagasc Calf Care Virtual Week rolled out last week, we asked Teagasc researcher Emer Kennedy & Joe Patton Teagasc nutritionist to discuss the guidelines for feeding milk and concentrates in the diet of the calf.

The primary goal of the rearing phase is to double the birth weight of the calf by 56 days of age. Good nutrition is fundamental to animal health, welfare and productivity. The type of liquid feed given to calves following colostrum is transition milk. The feeding of this depends on the farm targets, milk price, milk availability, disease status of the farm and labour availability.



Feeding milk

Emer Kennedy highlights the importance of following the correct guideline for making up the milk replacer by following the guideline of the product being used. Debate regarding the best temperature to feed milk or milk replacer stems from concerns about the impact that temperature has on the energy expenditure of the calf. The bottom line is that liquid feed is best provided at a constant temperature, i.e. avoid feeding warm milk one day, cool milk the next.

Feeding milk replacer is common practice on many farms. There is a wide range of milk replacer powders available, each with their advantages and disadvantages on nutritional content and cost. Some milk powders are suited to specific rearing systems so it is important to match the powder to the system employed.

Purchasing in dairy calves Emer advises on **feeding electrolytes** after transport for the first feed and depending on distance a second feed of electrolytes may be required. Once per day feeding can be introduced from 1 month of age but Emer warns of the need to check calves twice per day. Paying particular attention to calf health and any signs of illness.

Weaning can take place once calves are consuming 1kg of concentrate per head per day.

Feeding concentrates & Fibre



According to Job Patton, the intake of calf starter concentrates is the single most important factor in the development of the rumen, which is very small and undeveloped at birth. Starter intake is important in ensuring a smooth transition from milk feeding to an adult diet at weaning without setbacks to growth. In general, calves are fed a 'calf starter' ration up to 12-16 weeks of age

Joe advises that although consumption of concentrates is low it is important to introduce calves to it in the first week. **Hygiene of the trough is essential** and offering a little concentrate often is advised. Developing the rumen of the calf correctly is the main focus in the weeks up to weaning. Feeding good quality concentrates makes management post weaning easier.

It is important to measure and monitor the concentrate intake of the calves to ensure they are meeting their requirements. Introducing fibre is necessary to allow this to happen also. Clean good quality straw is preferred to hay.

Water

Water is often the most overlooked aspect of calf-rearing. Water consumption is important for the development of the rumen and to allow for timely weaning of calves off milk. Ruminants require quality fibre in the diet to maximise production and maintain health by sustaining a stable environment within the rumen. If the calves you are rearing are to achieve maximum production from pasture, then the importance of setting the rumen up for life with quality fibre early cannot be overemphasised.

From 3-4 days of age, fresh water should be offered to all calves. However, ideally water should be made available to calves from birth. Water should be available ad lib.

Upcoming Events

We will have a beef webinar on Wednesday the 27th January at 7.30pm. This webinar will deal with the BEAM scheme and fertiliser recommendations for the Spring. The BEAM scheme requires that farmers in the scheme must reduce Organic N by 5% before the 30th of June. If you haven't yet taken action on this, it would be important to tune into the webinar. Use this link to register for the webinar. <http://bit.ly/3qrpAP8>

We are holding a Teagasc Sheep Webinar on Tuesday the 2nd February at 7:30 pm on ZOOM. The main topics include Nutrition and Sheep Health. Guest speakers include Frank Campion (Sheep Specialist) and Charles Chavasse (Zoetis). To register for the webinar, please go to <http://bit.ly/3c0nwth>.

