

THE DAIRY PARTNER



A NEWSLETTER FOR
DAIRY FARM EMPLOYEES

CALF CARE

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2019

When is the best time to wean a calf?

Heather Schlessor Dairy Agent, UW-Extension Marathon County

The age of a calf at weaning is greatly debated. Some believe that 7 weeks of age is the right time, others say you need to wait till 9 weeks. Still others practice early weaning, and wean at 3 weeks of age. So what is correct?

It isn't about the age of the calf, but the development of their rumen.

The goal of the wet calf phase is to develop the calf into a ruminant. The first step in this process begins with consumption of colostrum. Colostrum acts as a prebiotic and promotes the growth of beneficial bacteria in the gut. Beneficial bacteria from colostrum start to colonize the gut within the first 12 hours after feeding.

Consuming starter grain in the wet calf phase of life is important for proper rumen development. Development of rumen papillae begins with the first consumption of starter. When starter is consumed, the rumen begins the process of fermentation and rumen bacteria begin to grow. Rumen function improves when calves consume starter at a young age. The sooner a calf consumes one pound of starter, the better.

The following recommendations are provided to guarantee a calf has a successful weaning process:



- ⇒ Offer fresh starter grain daily.
- ⇒ Make sure the distance from the top of the bucket of starter grain is no great than 24 inches from the ground.
- ⇒ The starter should have less than 6% fine material. Starter with a lot of fine material is unpalatable to young calves.
- ⇒ Calves need to consume about half a gallon of water for every pound of starter grain they consume. Water consumption may be enhanced by offering warm water after the milk feeding.
- ⇒ Monitor how much starter grain the calf is eating. The calf should consume 4 – 6 pounds of starter per day by weaning.
- ⇒ Watch manure color. As the rumen matures the color of the manure will change from light brown to darker brown. The consistency of the manure will also thicken.
- ⇒ Reduce the amount of milk offered gradually over a period of 1-2 weeks.

The weaning process can be stressful on calves... However, take the time to develop a young ruminant, and the calves can come through this period with little post-weaning growth slump.

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Stressed? Seek Help and Take Positive Personal Action

John Shutske, Safety Specialist UW-Extension, Biological Systems Engineering

Stress is common in dairy farming. The long hours can sometimes lead to fatigue, especially if there are not enough workers. While many workers enjoy working on family-run dairy farms because they feel respected, family situations back home are sometimes complicated being far away from “home” and feeling a lack of control during changing times and conditions can be very stressful. Other things that can cause stress are issues related to kids, finances, relationships, the weather and other things you cannot control. Stress can negatively affect our health, our sleep, our relationships, and our communication with others. When we are stressed or distracted, it also increases risk for an injury or making some type of other mistake. And, sometimes, we are experiencing things that are causing stress and may not even realize it though others might see that we seem unhappy, grouchy, tired, or just “different”. Because of these effects, it is important to recognize and manage the effects of stress...

Eat well, and make you drink enough water (and other fluids) to stay hydrated. Your body and brain need energy – cut back on sugar, caffeine, high fat food, and make sure you’re eating enough protein (lean meat, beans, eggs, fish, etc.).

Get enough sleep – Try and stick to a routine where you go to bed and get up at about the same time. Avoid caffeine many hours before bedtime. And, try not to spend time on your smartphone at least a couple hours before sleeping.

If you are healthy – try to get a little extra exercise. Dairy farming is hard work, but we may not get the type of activity that strengthens our heart, lungs, and brain. The routine of chores means the work often no longer raises your heart rate.

We all experience stress. When stress becomes overwhelming, it is important to recognize the harmful effects and to take action. If you are a farm owner, manager, HR manager, etc., we all need to be watchful for the signs of stress and proactively support our workers so that they can cope and manage effectively. This involves trusted relationships, open and honest communication, and partnering with local experts and sources of support in the community. It also takes time!

If any person on your farm expresses the signs and symptoms of extreme stress and talks about harming themselves or ending their life, it is important to provide help and support. The most important resource for support ANYWHERE in the U.S. is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline accessible for English speaking people at: 1-800-273-8255 or in Spanish at: 1-888-628-9454. See <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org> for more information.

Reproductive Success

Amanda Young, Dairy & Livestock Agent, UW-Extension, Dodge County

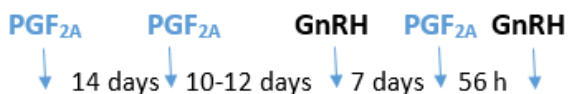
Many factors go into creating a successful pregnancy in the dairy herd. Some of these factors include the fertility of the male and female, artificial insemination (AI) protocol compliance, and AI efficiency. Some things take time to change, yet protocol compliance and proper AI practices can affect the herd’s reproductive success on a daily basis.

Protocol Compliance - OvSynch, PreSynch, Double OvSynch... there are many successful AI protocols that your farm may have chosen to use. While there are differences in every protocol the key to each is follow-through. The timing and hormones used are selected to cause a specific reproductive response in each animal, based on where she is

currently in her cycle. *Figure 1* shows the effect of giving the right shot to the right cow on the right day 95% or 90% of the time. Following the protocol 95% of the time means 77% of the animals will be ready for breeding. while following the protocol only 90% of the time decrease the animals ready for breeding to 59%.

Proper AI Practices - Additionally, pay close attention to your semen handling and inseminator techniques. Follow recommended semen thawing techniques; and deposit the semen in the uterine body as efficiently as possible upon thawing.

Figure 1: PreSynch-OvSynch Protocol Compliance



$$0.95 \times 0.95 \times 0.95 \times 0.95 \times 0.95 = 77\%$$

$$0.90 \times 0.90 \times 0.90 \times 0.90 \times 0.90 = 59\%$$

Contact your County UW-Extension office for English/Spanish Dairy Workers Training resources: www.yourcountyextensionoffice.com

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