

Issue 25 Monday 17th October 2005

**Creep Feeding.**

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Creep feeding is the practice of making feed available to unweaned calves but excluding their mothers. This can be done with a number of exclusion devices that restrict larger stock from accessing feed. Feeds used can be grain based protein meals, supplements, good quality hay, silage or even fresh pasture or fodder crop. The response from creep feeding varies and depends on the quality and quantity of pasture available and the milk production of the cows. The profitability of creep feeding varies with the feed conversion of the extra feed and the target market for the weaners.

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Short term creep feeding is often the most profitable strategy. Feeding for the last 4 to 6 weeks prior to weaning introduces calves to eating from troughs and is most efficient in terms of extra gain from feed. The feed used should be the same type of feed that you plan to use in the yards when weaning. Calves that have been creep fed go onto feed quickly when weaned and so avoid any initial setback. Larger weaners can have some urea included in the creep feed which should contain a minimum of 14% protein. If feeding smaller stock (less than 100kg) the protein content should be at least 16% and urea cannot be used.

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Creep feeding does not substitute for milk and so does not lower energy demands on the cow. Early weaning is the only way to restore positive energy balance to breeding stock in very dry conditions. Early weaned calves will benefit greatly from creep feeds prior to weaning. Creep feeding that causes calves to lay down fat will only be profitable when calves are sold at or soon after weaning.

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The feed conversion from creep feed varies with milk production and pasture condition. A greater response to creep feeds can be expected on dry pastures as milk production is lower. Protein meals can convert at 6kg of feed to 1kg of **extra** gain while grain based feeds convert at about 10 to 14 kg of feed to an **extra** kg of gain.

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Feeding smaller amounts can improve this feed conversion efficiency. This will also cause calves to use the extra feed more for growth than for laying down fat. On dry pasture feeding 250 to 500 grams per head per day of protein meal to calves can give extra weight gains of 250 to 500 grams. With larger calves this can be done as a 50:50 mix with Quicklick to limit intakes. Alternatively a self feeder with shut down slides or daily feeding can be used to feed straight protein meal.

If feeding grain it should be introduced slowly to prevent acidosis problems. Grain should be rolled rather than hammer milled to reduce dustiness. If you would like a creep feed ration formulated for your ingredients please call Rob.

Creep feeding for the last 4-6 weeks can set calves up for weaning and increase weight gains. Regulated feeding of protein meals on dry pasture can lead to excellent feed conversion efficiencies and is therefore a profitable strategy.

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