

## HAND FEEDING YOUNG CALVES

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Many individuals purchase dairy calves during the year and raise them for sale or meat. Other calves may be orphaned due to the death of the mother. In many cases, these calves do not survive the first week or two of their new environment.

Anytime a newborn calf is taken from the mother and raised separately several problems may arise. It is critical that the calf receive colostrum (the milk given during the first 5 days after calving) from a mother cow if it is to have any chance for long term survival. Colostrum contains antibodies to common diseases. When purchasing calves at auction it is important that the buyer receive an affirmation of this prior to the sale. If the calf does not receive colostrum within the first 12 to 24 hours following birth, it does no good to provide it later. The intestinal wall changes shortly after birth following the first ingestion of milk or water, and is incapable of absorbing the antibodies from the colostrum into its body after 24-hours.

The following recommendations will help ensure survival of hand raised calves:

- ❁ Place the calves in a warm, dry enclosure where they are protected from the wind.
- ❁ The calf may require assistance the first day or so until it is used to the feeding process. A nipple bottle or pail is valuable for starting calves, however they can learn to drink from a pail in a few days.

- ❁ Avoid placing a very young calf in a pen with an older animal. The older animal may harass the calf and compete for dry food.
- ❁ As a matter of course, it is a good idea to inject the new calf with vitamins A, D & E and Combiotic. Approved antibiotics in the milk replacer will help guard against respiratory problems, scours and other digestive upsets.
- ❁ Milk replacers made from dried milk are more expensive than soy based products. However, they may be better initially. Some calves may have, or develop, allergies to some of the proteins in either soy based or dried milk products. Be prepared to shift products if scours or other symptoms of product incompatibility occur.
- ❁ Ensure that there is adequate fat and protein in the milk replacer. Generally, fat content should be at least 20-25% at the onset while protein should be 18 - 20%.
- ❁ Feed the calf every three to four hours for the first two or three weeks. This is a critical element in the survival of very young calves. A little bit several times a day will be one of the best scours prevention measures one can employ.

The calf can go for eight hours between feedings, two to three weeks after birth. Good alfalfa hay along with a commercial calf starter ration, available from local feed stores, should be placed in the pen. Generally, it is more economical to feed at the rate the calf will eat, rather than putting large amounts of feed out for it to waste or become stale. Once the calf is eating five to six pounds a day (about 2.5% of body weight) it can be gradually weaned from the milk replacer. Calves should be observed for diarrhea

and/or other infections and treated accordingly.

Some calves have been successfully weaned as early as thirty days after birth. However, for the average person it is better to wean them gradually at 60 to 75 days of age. The key is to be sure of adequate consumption of the calf

starter and high quality alfalfa hay before weaning.

The new calf is very delicate and needs the same type of round the clock care the human baby needs. Before going out and purchasing a calf, be prepared for the time, effort and expense required to raise it.

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