



Information Sheet

Creeping, Weaning, and Preconditioning Calves



Information on supplementing young beef calves.

From the desk of Kelcey Swyers, Ph.D., PAS

Animal Nutrition, Technical Services Manager at Ranch-Way Feeds

When should calves be weaned?

Traditionally, beef calves are weaned when they are 180 to 220 days of age (6-7 months). Early weaning of calves can also be accomplished as long as the health and nutrition of the calves are properly managed.

Early weaning is commonly done when pasture is scarce and/or other feed resources are expensive. Due to poor diet quality or availability, cows with suckling calves would have difficulty maintaining body condition and be at risk of reduced reproductive performance and so early weaning becomes critical. Bucket/bottle fed calves can be slowly weaned off of liquid milk replacer when they are able to consume 2-3 lbs of dry matter per day (which can happen as early as 4 weeks of age, but is typically closer to 8 weeks of age). Research shows that it takes at least 3 weeks for the developing rumen to have adequate bacterial populations to handle dry feed.

What nutrition should weaned calves get?

Post-weaning, calves will initially consume a limited amount of dry matter (1-1.5% of their BW), and for this reason low quality feedstuffs should be avoided. Weaning/starter diets need to be nutrient dense (65-75% TDN), provide adequate protein (14-16% Crude Protein), and be fully fortified with vitamins and minerals. Additionally, calf weaning rations should provide a source of starch in the diet, yet be safe (have an adequate level of fiber, especially if they are to be fed free-choice). Starch serves as a food source to the microorganisms that populate the rumen. As that population grows, the starch is fermented into by-products such as the volatile fatty acids (VFA's) butyrate, propionate, and acetate. Propionate is absorbed by the calf's rumen and used as a source of energy, acetate serves as a precursor to fat deposition (body condition) in the calf, and butyrate serves as a local energy source to stimulate the growth of rumen papillae. Therefore, as the amount of available starch is increased in the diet, the concentration of VFA's is also increased and made available to support rumen development, plus calf growth and condition. Calves should also have free-choice access to a source of good quality hay or pasture during this time.

When should creep feeds be offered?

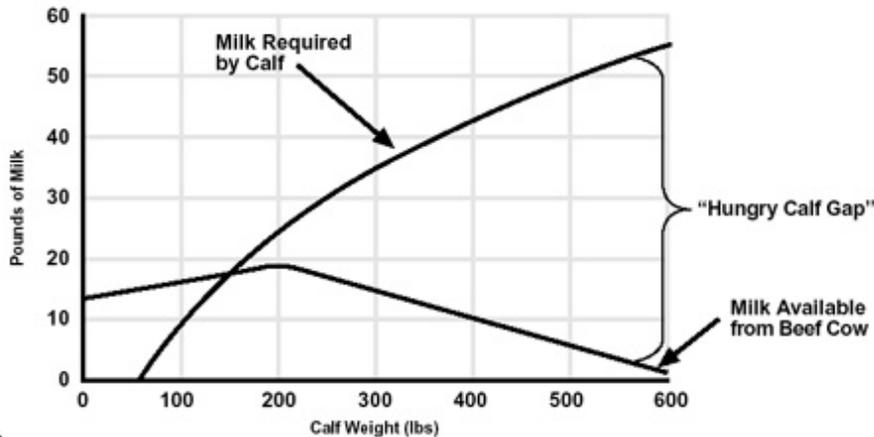
Creep feeding not only adds bloom, weight gain, and uniformity to the calf crop, but it also leaves cows in a better body condition once calves are weaned. Offering free-choice creep feeds to young calves is traditionally done in the early spring (before adequate pasture vegetation is available to support peak milk yield in beef cows) to fill the "hungry calf gap" (see Figure 1 on the back). Creep feeding is also common right before weaning, as it encourages calves to be bunk broke, thereby simplifying the stress of weaning. Bucket/bottle fed calves can have access to a calf starter grain a few days after birth (with good quality hay available starting around weaning time). Ranch-Way offers calf creep and starter rations that can be fed to young calves (see the back of this sheet for product details).

What are "VAC" programs?

Value Added Calf (VAC) programs is a marketing strategy that supports the cow-calf producer's efforts in vaccinating and precondition calves prior to selling and shipping. Preconditioned calves generally experience less stress, are healthier, and grow more efficiently post-weaning than non-preconditioned calves. Preconditioned calves that can be documented typically draw premiums at the time of sale. Ranch-Way offers calf supplements that would fit well into a cattle producer's preconditioning program (see the back of this sheet for product details).

Figure 1. Milk yield of a typical beef cow vs nutrient requirements of a nursing calf.

Figure courtesy of Dan E. Eversole, Extension Animal Scientist, Virginia Tech.



Creeping and Pre-Weaning Products

15% Calf Creep - an economical pelleted feed that provides calves with supplemental protein, energy, vitamins, and minerals while suckling and during the pre-weaning period.

15% Calf Creep is also available with Oxytetracycline (OTC), an antibiotic that can be used for increased rate of weight gain, improved feed efficiency, and reduction of liver condemnation due to liver abscesses (in growing cattle over 400 lbs). See product sheet for specific feeding instructions.

15% Seedstock Creep w/ Bio-MOS - a superior, high-fiber, value-added pelleted calf feed that provides calves with supplemental protein, energy, vitamins, and minerals during the time that they need it most. This creep feed is intended for purebred calves and those males and females going back into the breeding herd.

15% Seedstock Creep w/Bio-MOS is specially formulated with Zinpro's Availa-4 complexed (chelated) trace minerals, Ralco's CoMax, a source of organic Cobalt, and Alltech's Sel-Plex, Yea-Sacc and Bio-MOS products. Bio-MOS promotes "good" bacteria in the gut and inhibits certain pathogenic bacteria, thereby maximizing herd health and performance. See product sheet for specific feeding instructions.

Weaning and Preconditioning Products

14% Calf Receiving and Transition Ration - an economical pelleted feed, specially designed and fortified with vitamins and minerals for feeding newly weaned beef or dairy calves upon arrival in confinement feeding for the first 10 to 30 days. This feed may also be used for receiving stocker and feeder cattle that have been stressed and require higher levels of vitamins and minerals to restore good health. Limit feed to calves after weaning, during preconditioning, or upon arrival into a dry-lot feeding scenario. See product sheet for specific feeding instructions.

14% Seedstock Calf Transition Ration - a superior, high-fiber, value-added pelleted calf feed that provides calves with supplemental protein, energy, vitamins, and minerals during times of stress (such as weaning, sale and/or transport, or being introduced to bunk feeding in a dry-lot scenario). This feed is intended to be fed to purebred calves and those males and females going back into the breeding herd. *14% Seedstock Calf Transition Ration w/Bio-MOS* is specially formulated with Zinpro's Availa-4 complexed (chelated) trace minerals, Ralco's CoMax, a source of organic Cobalt, and Alltech's Sel-Plex, Yea-Sacc and Bio-MOS products. See product sheet for specific feeding instructions.

Showflake Starter - an 18% crude protein, textured sweet feed that contains flaked corn, crimped oats, and a full complement of vitamins and minerals. This feed is designed to get dairy calves and orphaned bucket/bottle-fed beef calves off to a good start. Offer this feed as soon as calves will nibble dry feed.

