

It's Wednesday at 4:30am. You're sipping on a cup of hot coffee, red eyed and exhausted from being up all night with a difficult calf delivery, you know it's going to be a long day – the girls will start lining up for milking soon. You think to yourself, "If this new calf makes it past the first few weeks, it will all be worth it."

Having transferred her from the maternity pen, you will need to monitor her intake of colostrum, ensure her body temperature is ideal and that her digestive and respiratory system is functioning well – this is just the beginning.

With the future of your dairy operation dependent not only on the subsequent lactation of your cow, you also need to ensure your replacement heifers are strong additions to your operation. The best growth for your calf is while she is on milk, she will achieve a better frame and body weight and be ready for her first reproductive cycle.

In this issue of Dairy Update our goal is to help you get your calf started off well. We will explain some of the most effective practices for caring for your calf from birth to 8 weeks of age. In the article titled "A Comparative Research Study on Calf Starter" we unveil the findings of the New-Life Mills research team, and in the Calf Q & A we speak candidly about some of your most pressing concerns on starting your calf off well.

Healthy and Weaned in Under 8 Weeks



BIRTH

- 1 Transfer calf from maternity pen immediately after birth
- 2 Provide colostrum - 4L within 6 hours, preferably over multiple meals (for improved absorption and digestion)
- 3 Keep your calf warm. Newborn calves cold stress at 10°C. Provide fresh bedding such as straw for insulation. A fully nested calf will be half hidden in the bedding
- 4 Check on your calf frequently during the evening and day



WEEK 1&2

- 1 Increase amount of milk/replacer offered. Decide which NLM starter program you will implement: NLM Good Start or NLM Supercharge
- 2 Start providing small amounts of NextGen 22% Pelleted Calf Starter
- 3 Introduce fresh drinking water (and moving forward)
- 4 Calves chill easily at this age, ensure ample fresh bedding and protection from the elements
- 5 Conduct daily health checks



WEEK 3 & 6

- 1 Gradually reduce availability of milk/replacer - doing this too quickly can slow down growth
- 2 Continue with NextGen 22% Calf Starter to assist with healthy calf development and improved immune system
- 3 Start to offer small amounts of hay or straw
- 4 Calf is still subject to cold - cold stress can set in at 0°C
- 5 Create consistency in environment and routine



WEANING Weeks 7 & 8

- 1 Gradually reduce availability of milk/replacer - doing this too quickly can slow down growth
- 2 Be consistent in environment and other routines - too much change at once can be stressful
- 3 Increase access to NextGen 22% Pelleted Calf Starter and fresh straw/hay
- 4 Increase availability of fresh water

WARNING
Bedding with sawdust does not provide the insulation needed to support your new calf!

DAIRY UPDATE

STARTING CALVES RIGHT

A Comparative Research Study on Calf Starters

In 2014, the New-Life Mills' Dairy research team conducted a comparative study of high quality Calf Starters to determine the value offered through the consumption of the NextGen Starter. Two dairy farms in Southwestern Ontario, using individual housing for their calves were supplied with NextGen 22% Calf starter. The producers were asked to feed calf starter once daily, and weigh back remaining amounts 24 hours later, increasing the amount of starter given when necessary. Once a week calves were weighed using a daily weight tape. Calves were also weighed after they had been weaned and moved to group housing.

Calves who were fed NextGen Calf Starter achieved ideal weaning weights by 5 weeks of age compared to the usual 8 weeks and over all calves had a higher daily weight gain than those fed textured calf starter.



Figure 1 - Picture of facility where textured feed was compared to New-Life Mills' NextGen pelleted feed.



Because You Asked...

How do I improve the transition between groups?

Answer: If calves/heifers are warm (lots of dry bedding, no draft), have access to food (including hay/straw to chew on and not just bedding) as well as low competition pressure they will transition much more smoothly. Making several changes at once will throw them off feed and young animals do not need to be off long before it starts to show!

My calves always seem to scour a few days after placing them in the calf barn – how do I fix that?

Answer: Calves that are afflicted by scours within the first 10 days are likely immune depressed and this comes from the maternity barn. We now know that if the dam is unwell she can pass that illness on to her calf so a calf is born weaker. We also know that if a calf is exposed to disease within the maternity pen she is very likely to catch it and calves express illness through scouring. Steps to improve are: (a) review dry cow management and nutrition with your nutritionist (b) speak to your vet about whether a pre-calving vaccination protocol would be beneficial and (c) make sure to grab your calf as soon as possible from the dam and place her in a pen that is clean, fresh, dry and warm. Also encourage nipple feeding, the suckling movement will energize the calf and improve digestion over tubing. If you need to tube, remember to attempt to bottle feed at the next feeding.

Can I feed ensiled feeds to my younger heifers?

Answer: Creating a TMR for young heifers does have its advantages – make sure that feeding can be done daily to avoid spoilage and feeding the lactating TMR is not appropriate unless your nutritionist has balanced for it. This feeding approach allows heifers to become accustomed to the on farm feeds which also helps with transition to other groups.

