

Post Rock Extension District Column

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Starting Newly Weaned Calves

One of the greatest challenges cattle producers often experience during weaning is getting newly weaned calves to consume feed in bunk. Unfortunately, successfully addressing this challenge is essential to success. Simply stated, “Cattle that don’t eat don’t perform.” Preparing calves, understanding how much dry feed calves will likely consume and developing a feeding strategy/plan is one of the best ways to ensure success in the weaning pen.

Feeding both cows and calves a small amount of the supplement or weaning ration prior to weaning, in the weaning pen or pasture can be used help acclimate calves to both the feeds and the environment. Additionally, feed intake of weaned calves is often low (1.0 to 1.5% of bodyweight, dry basis) immediately following weaning. Calves also have relatively high nutrient requirements. Thus, the weaning diet must be nutrient dense to meet the nutrient requirements of the calves at the expected intakes previously mentioned. Unfortunately, the dry feeds calves are often most familiar with (typically grass hays) are not necessarily nutrient dense. At the K-State Agriculture Research Center, Hays, KS, a feeding management protocol for weaning calves has been developed that works well for transitioning weaned calves to a total mixed ration. Essentially, high-quality grass hay and the weaning ration are offered each at 0.5% of the calves’ current bodyweight, dry basis, on the day of weaning. The weaning ration is placed in the bottom of the bunk and the hay is placed on top. The amount of the weaning ration is steadily increased, while the amount of hay offered remains constant. In addition, on day 4 the hay is placed on the bottom of the bunk instead. Over a period of 7-10 days the dry intake of the calves is steadily increased and should reach approximately 2.2-2.5% of the calves’ bodyweight by 10-14 days following weaning.

Thanks to Justin Waggoner for sharing information related to weaning calves and for further information, contact me at any Post Rock Extension District Offices in Beloit, Lincoln, Mankato, Osborne, or Smith Center.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Blaire may be contacted at blairet@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit 738-3597, Smith Center 282-6823, Lincoln 524-4432, Mankato 378-3174, or Osborne 346-2521. Join us on Facebook at “Post Rock Extension” along with our website www.postrock.k-state.edu.