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Calf Note #132 – Quality of drinking water

Some people say “don’t sweat the little things”. But when it comes to calves, the little things can mean big differences in calf health and performance. A case in point is a study conducted at Utah State University and reported in December, 2006. In this study, 72 calves were housed in individual plastic hutches for 60 days and offered starter and water in individual buckets. The water bucket was cleaned either daily, weekly (every 7 days) or every 14 days. Buckets were dumped and rinsed (not washed with soap and water), so labor efficiency was maximized.

The table shows the growth of calves through the first 60 days and from birth to sale at 160-170 days. Growth of calves whose buckets were cleaned daily grew about 9% faster to weaning and about 6% faster to sale than calves whose buckets were cleaned every two weeks. The performance of calves whose buckets were cleaned weekly appeared intermediate to the other groups. It’s noteworthy that performance of calves was improved both to weaning as well as to sale at 160-170 days. This suggests that the improved growth that occurred early in the calf’s life were carried through the early growing period.

This study can be criticized for small numbers (72 calves) and lack of statistical evaluation. However, the results do appear to have an important economic value, particularly in light of the limited input costs required to achieve the additional gain.

In addition to increased growth in calves whose water buckets were changed daily, the authors of the study also reported that these calves were treated less frequently than calves whose buckets were changed only every 14 days.

Simple things can make a real difference in calf management!

Reference

Wiedmeier, R.D., A.J. Young and P.R. Schmidt. 2006. Watch the drinking water quality of calves reared in individual hutches. AG/Dairy/2006-01pr.
http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/AG_Dairy_2006-01pr.pdf.

	Frequency of cleaning water buckets		
	Daily	7 d	14 d
Day 0-60			
Daily gain, lb/day	1.54	1.47	1.41
Weaning wt, lbs	181	176	172
Day 0-sale*			
Daily gain, lb/day	2.53	2.44	2.35
Weaning wt, lbs	506	491	476

*Sale occurred on day 160-170.

Written by Dr. Jim Quigley (25 February 2008)
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