

CALVING EASE

October 2010

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How Much Grain Should Our Weaned Calves Eat?

Summary:

1. Weaned calves cannot even maintain their weight if they are eating only 2 pounds of calf starter grain daily.
2. A good time to start the weaning process (cutting back on milk) is when calves are eating 2 pounds of grain a day.
3. Seasonally-appropriate amounts of grain are needed by weaned heifers to both maintain their bodies and to grow.
4. Most of us do not realize how much grain weaned heifers need to grow 2 pounds a day, especially in cold winter weather.

For just ages and ages many farms weaned calves based on their age. Little or no consideration was given to rumen maturity or level of grain consumption. This procedure works well for some calves and not so well for others.

More recently the industry has informally adopted the standard, "As soon as she is regularly eating 2 pounds of grain daily she is ready to wean." The term weaning here means to go off milk entirely. In volume depending on the pellet used this comes to about 1.7 to 2 quarts.

How much growth in a 170 pound heifer will 2 pounds of starter grain support?

Answer: None. Even in warm weather she will not even maintain her weight when she is eating only 2 pounds grain a day.

Remember, the energy and protein in her ration is divided between maintenance and growth. As heifers get larger and live in colder environments the maintenance needs go up. That leaves less for growth if the amount fed is fixed.

How much more grain does the 170 pound heifer need to eat to grow to gain 1 pound a day in warm weather?

Answer: We estimate that she needs to eat between 3.5 and 4.0 pounds daily. Recall this is to gain 1 pound a day.

Let's compare the nutrient needs of three size heifers at different seasons of the year. That will allow us to see how inadequate 2 pounds of starter is for meeting both maintenance and growth needs.

Pounds as fed	Starter Grain	For 1 lb. ADG by	Calf Weight & Season of Year	Season
Calf Weight		Summer	Spring/Fall	Winter
150		3.4	4.4	5.1
170		3.7	4.7	5.5
190		4.0	5.1	5.9

It is easy to see that none of the values in the table are any where near 2 pounds of grain. What does this tell me about the amount of grain I want my heifers to be eating when I pull them fully off of milk?

First, when they are eating 2 pounds of grain daily that is a good time to reduce the amount of milk they are receiving. I feel this is a good time to cut back on the milk. My recommendation for a farm feeding twice daily to cut off one of the two feedings. That is, cut the milk ration in half.

When the milk ration is cut in half the experience of many calf raisers is that grain intake goes dramatically in the next 3 to 5 days. Often grain consumption will go from 2 pounds to 4 or more pounds daily.

Second, keep in mind the season of the year. Note in the table above in the Winter column that all the values are greater than 5 pounds. And, you recall, these amounts will only meet maintenance needs and provide for 1 pounds average daily gain.

Third, if you are weaning calves around 150 pounds compared to heavier heifers remember that these lighter heifers need to be observed more carefully for pneumonia symptoms than heavier animals. The extra 20 or 40 pounds gives the larger calves more reserves to deal with weaning stresses.

Fourth, are you really serious about getting gains around 2 pounds a day? Then your 170 pound calf will need to consume in the neighborhood of 7 to 8 pounds of grain daily. Small amounts of hay will compliment the grain ration for these 8 to 12 week old animals.

If you know of someone that doesn't currently receive **Calving Ease** but would like to, tell them to **WRITE** to **Calving Ease**, 11047 River Road, Pavilion, NY 14525 or to **CALL** 585-591-2660 (Attica Vet Assoc. office) or **FAX** (585-591-2898) or **e-mail** calvingease@rochester.rr.com with Subscribe as the subject. Back issues may be accessed on the Internet at either www.atticacows.com or www.calfnotes.com and clicking on the link, Calving Ease.

Our thanks to Alpharma (makers of Bovatec and Deccox) for supporting Calving Ease.