

THE GLW Calf Rearing System

Most calf deaths are caused by de-hydration brought about by disease or stress triggered by being kept in an inappropriate environment, or by an inability to develop an adequate immune system early enough in life.

Housing must be well ventilated but free from draughts. High roofed, open buildings with good air flow are the most suitable. Cleanliness is paramount, so all surfaces should be easy to clean and suitable for disinfection. Pens, whether individual or group, should be well bedded and free draining. If raised, the floor underneath should be able to be flushed and disinfected daily.

Calves take about 12 to 24 hours after birth to build up an enzyme base in their gut. Hence the need for colostrum to supply initial immunoglobulin to trigger the calves own immune response system. Calves should receive 2 litres of colostrum within 4 hours of birth, 4 to 4.5 litres of colostrum within 24 hours, either by suckling, bottle or stomach tube. There is evidence to show that feeding colostrum for 48 hour is beneficial, and that heifer's calves should receive some colostrum from aged cows, as heifers' may have a relatively low immune response trigger. (Please note that although colostrum can successfully be frozen for storage, it must be thawed out naturally, not by microwaving or by the use of excessive heat.)

Once settled, calves should be started on 4 litres of whole milk or milk replacer per day (fed in two 2 litre feeds). This should be raised gradually until the daily intake is about 8 litres. If antibiotic or high cell count milk is to be fed to calves it should be pasteurised prior to feeding so ensure that it is "clean".

Research work has shown that if the calf's gut can be maintained below 5.5pH, most pathogenic organisms will not survive and health status is greatly improved.

Calves should be settled into the system by about 5 days of age, when de-horning should be carried out, and when GLW Gold Calf Weaner Pellets or Pedigree Calf Mixes should be introduced. Both these diets are specially formulated from highly digestible, natural raw materials to meet the increasing needs of the fast growing calf.

Clean straw should be made available from about 3 weeks of age to encourage rumen development, and the intake of the starter concentrate gradually built up to 2.0kg to 2.5kg per day.

Straw feeding should continue until 6 weeks of age when a little high dry matter silage may be introduced if it is intended to continue the rearing programme using this forage. (Low dry matter or high acid loading silages should not be offered below 16 weeks of age.)

At weaning, calves should be restricted to a maximum of 2.5kg of concentrate per day for about 4 days to control any possible dietary upset due to gorging, and should remain on the starter ration for a further 10 to 14 days, before being gradually introduced to Heifer Grower or Cattle Rearer depending upon forage type and quality. (Please refer to our Heifer Rearing System information sheet for further advice.)

As with all our feeds, the Calf Feeds range comes with the "GLW Positive Response Commitment", including access to experienced technical support, dedicated customer service, raw material, and transport teams, ensuring that you receive what you want, when you need it.

..... Your feeding system for lifetime performance