

Key Components When Managing Weaned Dairy Calves

COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION
SERVICE



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Establishing a good weaned dairy calf protocol has a huge impact on the health of the calf, her age at calving, and potentially future milk production. Here are some key points on how to maximize success when weaning calves and managing them shortly after weaning.

- **Weaning off milk/milk replacer and changing feed:** Although there are two different types of feeding programs commonly used today (conventional and accelerated), it is absolutely critical that you make changes in amount of milk/milk replacer and type of grain slowly and gradually. Milk and reconstituted milk replacer should be reduced to once daily feeding for 3 to 7 days before calves are completely weaned off milk or milk replacer. Calves should remain on the calf starter while being weaned and for at least 10 days after weaning is completed. If you do not do both of these management practices, growth can be reduced at a time when growth is the most cost effective.
- **Housing:** It is important to group weaned calves in small groups of 6 to 8 heifers. This limits competition for feed resources. You should also try to group heifers of similar size; don't group your largest heifers with your smallest. Finally, ventilation is very important for respiratory health. Try to keep air moving through your heifers' housing (above the top of the heifers).
- **Nutrition:** As with any animal, it is very important for these heifers to have clean, accessible water at all times. You should start feeding hay **only** after the heifer is eating 5 lbs. of grain. The highest quality hay should be fed to these animals. Make sure that the heifers can access the feed bunk easily, as this will affect dry matter intake.