



Creep Feeding and Pre-Weaning Nutrition

Our two-cents to add to your profits from



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At 3-4 months old, the lactating beef cow is only providing 50% of the nutrients that a calf needs to reach its genetic potential for growthⁱ. This gap between the nutrition provided by the cow and the nutrition needed by the calf is called the “hungry calf gap.” The rest of this nutrition needs to come from another source. If your cattle are on a high quality pasture that is ideal, as consuming forages/roughages will stimulate rumen development in calves.

However, in some spring calving herds like ours, this time when the calf is shifting its nutritional needs from milk to grass, comes during July/August, which is when our native pasture’s quality and quantity is declining. In these cases, it can be beneficial to provide a creep concentrate to meet this hungry calf gap. Especially in our program, as a seedstock producer, we want our bulls and heifers to be developed to meet their nutritional needs so that they mature, and breed, early. The pre-weaning nutrition of the calf affects the time of pubertal development. In bulls, this pre-weaning nutrition implies earlier maturity and larger lifetime testis sizeⁱⁱ. The same applies to heifers. “Recent research into early weaning (either planned or drought forced) and other calfhood nutritional strategies produced insight into the importance and influence of calf nutrition before 6 to 7 months of age. It appears this is a critical period in heifer development.”ⁱⁱⁱ Calves lacking in nutrition during the pre-weaning time period mature later, and breed later, than calves that have their nutritional needs met during this time. Another benefit of creep feeding is that calves are better able to handle weaning since they are already bunk broke and accustomed to eating feed.

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There are considerations to take into account when deciding if creep feeding is right for your herd. If you have a good supply of quality pasture, creep grazing would be the best option. Cost of feed is another consideration. If feed is expensive, creep feeding may not be a feasible option for all producers.

Our main concern is that we want to meet the calf’s nutritional needs, but we do not want them to get fat. Since we retain our own replacement heifers and sell breeding bulls, it is very important for the future fertility of our stock that we do not over-feed our cattle. To get the most benefit from creep feeding without affecting future fertility, we feed a No Corn Starch creep feed^{iv} that is formulated with highly digestible fiber sources to promote healthy frame growth without too much condition.

For more information about creep feeding, the Virginia Cooperative Extension has a great article that describes the advantages and disadvantages of creep feeding (<http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/400/400-003/400-003.html>). To learn more about the No Corn Starch creep feed that we get from Big Gain, visit their website at <http://www.biggain.com/index.cfm?show=10&mid=101>.

Sources:

ⁱ Creep Feeding Beef Calves. Dan E. Eversole, Extension Animal Scientist, Virginia Tech. Virginia Cooperative Extension. Publication 400-003. <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/400/400-003/400-003.html>. Accessed 8/27/2016.

ⁱⁱ “Managing Bull Development to Optimize Fertility” Barth, Albert. Western College of Veterinary Medicine, Saskatoon, SK. Proceedings, Applied Reproductive Strategies in Beef Cattle, 2012, Sioux Falls, SD. Pages 121-126. http://www.appliedreprostrategies.com/pdfs/2012ARSBC_09BarthProceedings.pdf Accessed 8/27/2016

ⁱⁱⁱ “Heifer Development: Same Challenges-More Options” Hall, J.B. et al. Twin Falls Research and Extension Center, University of Idaho. Proceedings, Applied Reproductive Strategies in Beef Cattle, 2015, Davis, CA. Pages 130-145. <http://appliedreprostrategies.com/2015/documents/proceedings/06John-Hall-pg130-145.pdf> Accessed 8/27/2016

^{iv} Big Gain Inc. 14% NCS Creep Feed. <http://www.biggain.com/index.cfm?show=10&mid=101>