

Calves and Bicycle Wheels

[Part 2 of a six-part series]

In a short provocative article Ryan Leiterman and Lorrie Meister (Crystal Creek Natural) make the case for considering every aspect of calf care (the spokes in the bicycle wheel) to optimize calf health and growth. A perfectly round wheel depends on all spokes being strong. When one or more of six key spokes become weak the chances of delivering well-grown, healthy calves goes down.

Let's look at spoke Number 2 - Calories

The authors recommend evaluating the strength of this "spoke" using

- Milk cultures
- Weighing calves – remember the rule of thumb – double weight in first 60 days.

If you are not using both of these methods to evaluate your nutrition management program the risk of a weak "spoke" may be high.

I recommend:

1. Regularly sample and culture your "as-fed" milk/milk replacer – see a sampling protocol <http://atticacows.com/library/newsletters/BacteriaQualityControlMilkR1974.pdf>
2. Estimate weight of calves during the first week of life and again at a suitable interval – for example, the week before or of weaning. For consistent results with scales remember to weigh calves either before or after feeding each time. The authors recommend using calibrated digital scales.

I must admit to having used only a Holstein calf weight tape (Coburn #44556) on most of my farms. If you use a tape look at this resource for useful tips:

<http://atticacows.com/library/newsletters/WeightTapeUseTipsN19200.pdf>

Reference: "Calves and bicycle wheels: A systematic approach to troubleshooting pre-weaned calves" by Ryan Leiterman and Lorrie Meister. Click [HERE](#) to go to the article or use this URL <https://crystalcreeknatural.com/comparing-calves-to-bicycle-wheels-a-systematic-approach-to-troubleshooting-pre-weaned-calves/#more-8192>.