

WEANING CALVES: A CHECKLIST

1. How long has she been eating calf starter grain?

Has she been eating calf starter grain for at least 3 weeks?

Start counting days on calf starter grain when she regularly cleans up a measurable amount daily. That's roughly a scant handful – maybe ½ cup.

Assuming she has access to water, after a calf begins to eat calf starter grain she takes about 3 weeks of fermentation in her rumen to develop papillae. They are tiny finger-like growths on the inside of the rumen wall. They are essential for absorbing nutrients from rumen fermentation.

2. How much calf starter grain is she eating?

Is she eating 4 quarts a day? [Most grain mixes average 1 pound per quart.]

If a 150 pound calf eats this much calf starter grain daily she can meet her maintenance needs and grow about 1 pound a day in summer weather. Bigger calves need more for maintenance. Higher growth goals require more. Colder weather conditions require more.

3. How regularly is she eating calf starter grain?

Is she eating at least a minimum of 3.5 to 4 quarts daily? That is different than an average of 3.5 quarts that may

vary from less than a quart one day to 4 quarts or more two days later.

One characteristic of rumen maturity is regular feed intake. Irregular intake is associated with acidotic rumen conditions and undesirable digestion. Calves with greater rumen maturity tend to even out their calf starter grain intake (assuming they have ad lib. access to calf starter grain and water).

4. Is the calf generally healthy and growing?

No matter how it is done, weaning is stressful for a calf. Even if calves continue to grow at weaning, the rate of growth falls off for about 5 to 7 days after weaning.

If a calf's immune system is in any way depressed (scours, respiratory illness, navel infection, dehorning, change in housing, exceptionally hot or cold weather, poor bedding), it's good management to delay weaning until conditions improve

- | | YES | NO |
|--|-----|-----|
| 1. Nearly all my calves have been eating calf starter grain for at least 3 weeks before I <u>begin</u> weaning them. | ___ | ___ |
| 2. Nearly all my calves are eating 4 quarts of calf starter grain a day before I wean them. | ___ | ___ |
| 3. Nearly all my calves are regularly eating calf starter grain every day before I wean them. | ___ | ___ |
| 4. If a calf is stressed (depressed immune system) I wait until she has recovered before I wean her. | ___ | ___ |

Sam Leadley, Calf & Heifer Management Specialist

sleadley@yahoo.com www.atticacows.com

For Calves with Sam blog go to dairyalfcare.blogspot.com

© Attica Vet. Assoc. 2017 All Rights Reserved.