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KNOW-HOW FOR YOUR CALF REARING

Management tips – The little things are the big things!

What can the feeder tell me about my calves and calf feeder programs?

There's a wealth of information on the cloud about function of a calf autofeeder. Let's focus on examples on two farms using autofeeders.

Feed		Calf No.		CF	Plan	St.	Drinking speed		Break-off		Visits		Housing date	Feec
Yesterday	Today						Yesterday	Today	Yesterday	Today	With entitlement	Without entitlement		
 6.1	 3.7	AVG					103	104	1	0	2	14	?	18
 6.4	 4.3	221		Feeder 2	A	1	104	103	0	0	2	21	6/9/2025	18
 4.1	 2.3	222		Feeder 2	A	1	70	155	10	0	1	6	6/9/2025	18

This is just part of the list of calves on a feeder. The first line is a summary of all calves on this feeder. Average intake yesterday and thus far today is shown. Drinking speed is relatively stable from day to day. The second and third lines represent two calves. What is most concerting with these calves and all calves on the feeder relates to visits. Calves receive all their allocation in two visits, with entitlement. However, they are returning to the feeder many times – an average of 14 because they are hungry.

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Quantity (Table)

Period	Days	Start value (L)	End value (L)	<input type="checkbox"/> 40FIT
1	<input type="text" value="14"/>	<input type="text" value="6.0"/>	<input type="text" value="8.0"/>	
2	<input type="text" value="7"/>	<input type="text" value="8.0"/>	<input type="text" value="8.0"/>	
3	<input type="text" value="35"/>	<input type="text" value="8.0"/>	<input type="text" value="8.0"/>	
4	<input type="text" value="7"/>	<input type="text" value="8.0"/>	<input type="text" value="5.0"/>	
5	<input type="text" value="14"/>	<input type="text" value="5.0"/>	<input type="text" value="1.0"/>	
Sum	77 Days		520.40 L	<input type="text" value="1.0"/> h

The reason can be seen in the feeding plan shown for these calves. For the first 14 days milk allocation is increased to from 6 to 8 L and then actually held constant for the next 42 days. These calves are hungry. They return to the feeder often to try to get more milk. This creates several problems. First the stall occupation is very high as calves are trying to get more milk. This prevents some calves that can receive milk from entering the feeding stall. The nipples will often need to be replaced more often as calves will chew on them. One other issue with the feeding plan was that only 135 g of milk replacer powder were added to each liter of water. This means that the final solids concentration will be $135/135+1000 =$ only 11.8% solids or a rather dilute solution.

Compare this to a feeding plan on another farm using the 40FIT program which permits calves to eat as much as they want for the first 32 days in the feeder.

Quantity (Table)

Period	Days	Start value (L)	End value (L)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 40FIT
1	<input type="text" value="32"/>	<input type="text" value="6.0"/>	<input type="text" value="8.0"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="text" value="4"/>	<input type="text" value="12.0"/>	<input type="text" value="8.0"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="text" value="10"/>	<input type="text" value="8.0"/>	<input type="text" value="8.0"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	<input type="text" value="14"/>	<input type="text" value="8.0"/>	<input type="text" value="2.0"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	<input type="text" value="0"/>	<input type="text" value="0.0"/>	<input type="text" value="0.0"/>	
Sum	60 Days		411.90 L	<input type="text" value="2.0"/> h

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The start and end values in period 1 are only for purposes of alarms. For the calves on this feeder and feeding plan, the average visits with entitlement are 4 and there are no or few visits without entitlement. Calves are consuming enough to satisfy their needs and they are much calmer.

This plan feeds more to calves early in life and then weans them sooner. The first plan would allocate 520 L of milk replacer solution over 77 days while the second plan using 40FIT only allocates 411 L over 60 days.

Stay tuned to the calfblog for more tips on calf feeder management!