

PROGRESSIVE, INNOVATIVE

FEEDING SOLUTIONS

***Weaning and starting calves is much like kindergarten***

Most of us think we do a good job with our weaning practices and have settled into certain habits. Fall rolls around and we do what we always do.

Have you ever stopped to evaluate your weaning practices and asked yourself hard questions to determine if there could be simple improvements that could pay dividends?

Weaning calves is a lot like sending kids off to kindergarten for the first time. Think about that and a few things from the perspective of a 5-6 month old calf. The day we wean them from their mom is a very similar situation.

First is the trip to the doctor generally about a month before school starts. The kids get their vaccinations and their weight checked. Mom is there the whole time for comfort and familiarity.

The first day of school can create some anxiety or excitement. But at school we know the teacher has been preparing for several days. They have decorated and organized the classroom to create an environment that is pleasant. The thermostat in the classroom is set at a comfortable temperature. The school cooks have a good breakfast and lunch ready for them each day. Everything will be done on a routine with attention to detail to help the kids have a positive experience.

I’m sure that’s how your weaning time went as well, right? Maybe not. Does the following scenario sound at all familiar?

We rush through weaning because we are busy with harvesting other crops. The cattle lot didn’t get cleaned out over the summer from the previous spring and there won’t be bedding until we can bale stalks next month. Not a good start but the calves will get by.

What’s for dinner? The tub grinder can’t get here till next week so we will use the old stalk bales. The calves are tough they will get by. What else besides the stuff we call hay goes in the bunk? We know they need some corn, dump that in. But not too much … we don’t want them to get acidosis. We put up silage a couple weeks ago. It’s still hot (burns my hand when I stick it in the silage) because it is not done fermenting. Oh, that won’t be a problem, let’s dump some of that in, too. The thumb rule is that a calf should eat 3% of his body weight each day. But, was that on a dry matter or an as-fed basis? What is the dry matter content of my silage anyway? Guess we should have sampled it.

After the first day, the bunk is slick and clean. That’s a good sign. Three days later over half of what we put in the bunk is left. What happened?

The fences are “pretty good” and we only had to “re-wean” about 15 head. We see some scours and a few don’t look like they have eaten anything. Some of them look really good and are coming to the bunk, but a few are so hoarse from bawling that they can no longer make a sound more than a squeak. One has a dry nose and looks like he may be breathing a little hard, one looks bloated but I will look at him tomorrow.

Was the weaning experience for your calf crop more like the first week of kindergarten for your child or grandchild, or was is more like the scenario I just described above?

Sometimes we ignore management practices that are essential to cattle being healthy, performing well, and improving the income they can provide for us. The past few years the calf crop has been an important income stream! Doing things right is well worth the effort.

US Feeds has developed a new weaning/starting program called **ReCharge**. There are several products in the ReCharge family designed to fit different feeding strategies. The products implement the latest Alltech technologies that have been proven to improve health and performance of calves. The successes have been phenomenal.

Allow your US Feeds Territory Feed Consultant and/or your US Feeds dealer help you map out a weaning program before the time is upon you. Let’s come up with a plan of action that will fit into your particular management and labor situation. Part of that plan will be a properly balanced ration that fits your situation. Also, US Feeds can provide you with **a feeding guide** so that you can bring calves up to full feed in an orderly manner without digestive disturbances while insuring a nutrient dense diet providing the right amount of feed each day.

***ReCharge … When health is in your charge***

