



Weaning Calves this Autumn

Now the clocks have changed and nights are drawing in, this is the time of year when we need to focus on our youngstock. Whether that be the suckler herd, thinking about pneumonia vaccinations and how to achieve the smoothest wean, or the dairy calf considering the nutritional level and stocking density.

Weaning is a very stressful time for calves, whether at 10 weeks old as a dairy replacement or 10 months old as a beef suckler. A change in nutrition is often coupled with social stresses and housing changes. Ensuring this is planned and is as smooth as possible is key; thinking about how long we take to reduce milk feeding and encourage concentrate intakes for the dairy animal, or how we introduce silages and concentrates in the beef system. Nutrition is key to lessen the impact and possible energy crash when the milk is removed. Also, as the cold winter is around the corner, offering calves a minimum of 1kg of milk powder a day will help the calves maintain their temperatures, create an immune system and ensure growth. However, this will need to be stepped down over a minimum of 2, ideally 3 weeks, to achieve adequate concentrate intakes. For the 10 week old dairy replacement they should be eating a minimum of 3kg/head/ day to cover their maintenance and growth requirements.

It also has to be remembered that weaning is the time for cheapest lean growth, as at this age their conversion rates are still high, however the feed cost is lower than that of milk or milk powder so putting plans in place to limit disease at this stage is key to efficient growth.

This nutritional change is often accompanied with a change in housing. Ensuring adequate space is vital for a smooth stress free and disease free transition. 2.5m² – 3m² bedded space is suggested for a 10 week old weaned dairy animal, along with a feed space of over 50cm per animal.

Ensuring the food is evenly spread along the feed rail is also important as smaller or less dominant animals need to still get their share.

For beef suckler calves the age range within a group can have a massive impact at this time. Suckler calves are usually all weaned at once, even though there may be a variation of 3 months or more within a group. Trying to wean an 11 month animal in the same pen as a 7 month old can be very tricky.



Pneumonia is often a problem at this time of year. The changes in diet, housing, groups and weather can all increase the risk of pneumonia. Ventilation within the weaned shed is something we can influence to reduce risk. Limiting age range within an air space is one way to limit exposure. Calves are often moved from the milk shed, where the age range is limited to 10-12 weeks, into a larger shed often with animals up to a year older in the same air space.

These larger sheds may also suffer from poor ventilation. Sheds may not allow the stack effect to be fully functional, or the outlets in the roof might limit air movements.



Vaccinations can reduce pneumonia incidence and severity. At this age the intranasal vaccination for the two most common viral causes of pneumonia given within the first few weeks of life is wearing off. To maximise subsequent vaccine efficacy we need to ensure a full course is given at least 2 weeks before the stressful time (weaning, housing, etc.) This may mean giving the first injection over 8 weeks pre housing. Just vaccinating at the time of housing will usually yield disappointing results.

General good health before weaning and the body weight at this stage is a massive determining factor of how well our calves can deal with this transition. If the calf has suffered from scour early on then this can still cause stress on the guts in later life, and often means they are smaller and more prone to being bullied off the feed. If the calf has suffered from pneumonia pre weaning this can re-activate and become clinical disease again, or the scar tissue now within the lungs means they can be more prone to catch the disease again.

Top tips to preparing for weaning this season

Nutrition – ensure pre weaning nutrition is good and general health is high before weaning is started.

Try and ensure the transition is as smooth as possible with a stepped down milk intake and an increase in concentrate and forage intakes.

Housing – ensure correct stocking density.

Aim for as tight of an age range within the air space as possible.

Vaccination – can be used to further reduce risk, for more advice for your farm please contact us.



Kat Hart





Christmas stocking filler -
Charity calendar -£10 each - all
proceeds split between FCN & DPJ
Foundation.

MEETINGS COMING UP

Sheep meeting

It's getting to that time of year, especially with all the rain we've had, when we can see more lameness problems with wet conditions underfoot. Hence the focus of this meeting will be on lameness.

We'll be discussing lameness causes, control and treatment / management including footbathing and Footvax.

Food will be provided.

7pm on Tuesday 12th November @ Gupshill Manor, GL20 5SY

and

7pm on Wednesday 20th November @ Old Royal Ship, Luckington, SN16 6PA

If you'd like to come along, please
email: farm@georgevetgroup.co.uk or
Phone: 01666 823035 for catering

