

Limited Creep Feeding

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Last month we discussed free-choice creep feeding of beef calves for several months before weaning. Results of trials in Alabama, Oklahoma, and Florida strongly indicated that conventional creep feeding of calves was not economical. Exceptions may be the use of creep feeding during a drought or for calves nursing first-calf heifers. Creep feeding during these two situations may help the cow as well as the calf.

One advantage of creep feeding is that it teaches calves to eat dry feed from a trough prior to weaning such that they immediately start eating dry feed after weaning. Benefits to the calf would be better weight gains and fewer health problems during the post weaning period.

A compromise may be to creep feed calves only a limited amount of feed for a short period (3 weeks) before weaning to hold down feed cost. In the early 1970's Dr. Joe Crockett and I evaluated a concept we termed "limited creep feeding." We creep-fed calves for 14 days with less than one pound of feed per calf per day. Feed cost were less than \$1.00 per calf. Other calves were not fed creep feed.

Over four trials, calves fed creep feed gained 8 pounds more during a 4 week post weaning feeding period than calves not fed creep feed. An 8 pound heavier calf is a good return on a \$1.00 investment.

Next we tested the "limited creep feeding" concept on a commercial cow-calf operation in south Florida. Over 100 calves were fed 1 pound per calf day of dry concentrate creep feed for 3 weeks before weaning. A similar number of calves were not fed creep feed. All calves were fed 10 pounds of feed per calf daily for 35 days after weaning. At the end of the post weaning period calves fed creep feed prior to weaning gained 20 pounds per calf more than calves not

fed creep feed. Again, a 20 pound heavier calf is a good return on a \$2.00 investment.

"Limited creep feeding" is a calf management practice that would be well worth while for cattle producers that retain ownership of calves into subsequent backgrounding or finishing phases. It would also be worth while to all individuals who purchase calves at weaning if they would recognize the value of this calf management practice and financially reward calf producers for their troubles.

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact



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