

# Does Creep Feeding Calves Pay?

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Creep feeding calves is a way to put additional weight on calves prior to weaning. However, the performance of calves and the economics of creep feeding is not a sure thing.

A three year creep feeding study conducted in Alabama by Auburn University showed that calves fed creep feed for 182 days prior to weaning gained an additional 36 pounds. Calves consumed 507 pounds of creep feed. Today, the additional gain is worth about \$30 per calf (avg. heifers and steers). However, the cost of creep feed (at \$200 per ton) was \$50 per calf. Obviously, with these costs and returns creep feeding is not economical.

In a three year study in Oklahoma, heifer and steer calves fed creep feed for 159 days prior to weaning were 30 pounds heavier than non creep-fed calves. Creep-fed calves ate 363 pounds of feed. Today, the additional gain is worth approximately \$25 per calf and the cost of creep feed is about \$37 per calf. Again, with these cost and return values creep feeding is not profitable.

Another Oklahoma study involved creep feeding calves nursing two-year-old first-calf heifers. Calves creep fed 135 days were 108 pounds heavier at weaning than calves not creep fed. With the higher price per pound market value for the smaller non-creep fed calves, the advantage is only about \$50.00 per calf fed creep feed. Calves ate 740 pounds of creep feed which would cost about \$74. With these cost and returns, creep feeding is not profitable even for calves nursing two-year-old heifers.

In a four year creep feeding study at Brooksville, Florida, calves received creep feed for 60 days prior to weaning. The average increase in gain from creep feeding was 27 pounds per calf. It is interesting that the average gain response

to creep feeding varied from 6 pounds per calf in the poorest year to 50 pounds per calf in the best year. A breed response to creep feeding also occurred, with a 52 pound increase for Hereford calves, a 34 pound increase for Brangus-type calves, and only an 8 pound increase for Brahman calves. Over all, calves consumed about 600 pounds of creep feed. With a feed cost of about \$60 per calf, creep feeding would be far from being profitable.

Creep feeding calves is not an economical practice in most situations. Gain responses might offset feed costs during a drought or for calves nursing first-calf heifers. Also, the \$200 per ton cost for creep feed is for that delivered in 50 pound bags. Creep feed purchased in bulk quantities would cost much less which would help return a profit. But even with discounted feed prices, profits from creep feeding nursing calves are questionable. Also, the above economic analysis does not include the cost of creep feeding equipment nor labor.

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