

Young Stock - The Missing Link



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The major focus on many dairy operations is to have high quality feeds provided to the milking herd and to produce milk in an economically effective manner. The second focus is on the dry cow program with the primary goal of having a feed

program that keeps cows holding weight - a proper balance of cations of course - with the desired goal of having a smooth transition to lactation.

With all the care and emphasis placed on the lactating and dry cows, the heifer from 400 lbs. to 6 months post breeding is often the more forgotten animal on the farm. No matter how well the farm is run, there is always some feed that gets put up in poor shape. This feed is typically destined for the young stock, and often times does not even get tested. Young stock may also receive left over dry cow feed. In addition to not paying close attention to the heifers' feed needs, this group of animals often experience overcrowded conditions and generally rougher living conditions than the milking group of animals. This group is the dairy's future and there are steps, like providing a balanced ration, which can be taken to help them reach their full potential.

Younger calves and heifers under 180 days of age are not fully functional ruminants and have

significant growth requirements. Development of rumen papillae at a young age is accelerated by grains. At a weight of 300 to 400 pounds calves do not have the ability to consume sufficient quantities of silage to sustain their needs for growth and development. The provision of grain and dry roughages - good quality hay - can greatly enhance the growth and healthy development of young animals.

Meeting requirements, especially for energy and protein, is very important to good heifer development. Protein requirements of young stock at 300 to 400 lbs. are greater than for older animals that are established in size and are able to consume a larger amount of feed.

If the desire is to have larger framed heifers gaining 1.8 lbs. per day, the table below can be used as a guideline. Either too much energy or too little protein can be serious limiting factors to the development of the heifer. Crossbred heifers, especially those from dual purpose genetics, would have lower nutrient demands than the guidelines shown below and can be fed a ration that is lower in energy. In summary, it may better serve us to rethink how we raise our replacement heifers. A healthy and properly developed heifer is a big investment. Doing a better job with young stock will result in more productive, efficient animals in the lactating herd.

Table 1

FEEDING GUIDELINES

Target Body Weight Post Calving.....1200-1300 lbs

BODY WEIGHT (lb)	DRY MATTER INTAKE (lb)	CRUDE PROTEIN (%)	NET ENERGY (mcal/lb)
200	6.5	16.3	0.72
500	12.9	14.3	0.68
800	20.0	12.2	0.61
1200	32.3	12.2	0.58

* adapted from Brinton and Whitlow and Spartan ration program