

Key Points

- Staff need patience and a high level of management and stockmanship.
- 2. Plan ahead and ensure suitable facilities are available.
- 3. Good calf weights can be achieved with a relatively low cost system.
- 4. Cows can be bought as budget in-calf cows and some people breed their own self-replacing nurse cow herd.
- 5. Can successfully raise 3-4 calves per batch and 2-3 batches per season. A total of 10 calves per cow.
- 6. There are various methods of mothering on foster calves. All involve time, patience and monitoring.



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Calf Rearing Fact Sheet 3.8

Staff

- Staff must be patient and enjoy the challenge of mothering on (difficult) calves.
- Staff must be committed with a high level of management skill to be successful. Without the right staff this system will fail.

General

- Mothering on and multiple suckling of calves on cows is a low cost way to rear calves and calves reared on nurse cows normally grow very well.
- However, nurse cow reared heifers have had less contact with people and are often more difficult to train to be milked.
- A high producing, well fed Friesian cow, can raise 3-4 calves at a time and then rear another 2 or 3 sets of calves during the season. Alternatively, the first set of calves can be left on and weaned at 200+ kg at the end of summer.
- The cow and her calves require plenty of high quality feed (20 kg DM/cow/day).
- Need suitable facilities for mothering on and shelter for calves while they are very young.

Obtaining cows

- Friesian cows are usually preferred if planning on retaining for the next season as a Jersey cow's own calf is not usually of high value.
- Purchase in-calf cull cows.
- Arrange to take on carry over cows that are still producing well. These may raise fewer calves than a cow purchased in early lactation.
- Three calves on a cow at a time and three sets of calves over a season can often be raised. e.g. Autumn calves, end of July and again early October although the last group may be hard to procure.

Mothering on

- It is possible to raise 2-4 calves on one cow depending on her milk supply.
- Remove the cow's own calf and place this calf with the foster calves together in a covered pen. Ideally keep each "calf set" together.
- When choosing foster groups, aim to group similar calves together—same weight, temperament, age.
- Run cow in night and morning initially, allow each calf to suckle for 10-15 minutes ensuring all calves get adequately fed.
- Once the cow is relatively accepting of her new family they can be left together and placed by themselves in a slightly larger enclosure for the cow to access some feed and water. DO NOT over feed cows at this stage.

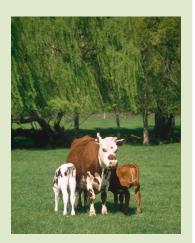






More keys to success

- 7. Calves can very quickly go down with scours from over feeding. Do not overfeed cows in the early stages.
- 8. Only mob up with other cows and calves when well bonded.
- Calves weaned too early will suffer from a check as the rumen is insufficiently developed.
- 10. A cow with 3-4 calves will need to be fed as a fully lactating cow. At least 20 kg DM/cow/day.
- DO NOT forget about these cows and calves once the mothering on is finished.



Mothering on

- Closely monitor your cows and calves. OBSERVE often.
- Once let out of the shed the cow's own calf may overfeed, resulting in scours.
- Increase intake of cows gradually. Very high intakes too soon can result in calves overfeeding, resulting in scours. Calves with scours can go down very quickly.
 Treat for dehydration promptly.
- Once cow and her foster family are bonded they may be joined to a larger group.
- In large mobs, cross suckling often occurs. Watch for tail-enders.

Growing and weaning

- A cow raising four calves will require at least 20 kg DM/day as these cows are producing large quantities of milk.
- Nurse cow reared calves cannot be weaned early as the rumen is insufficiently developed.
- Calves can normally be weaned at 10 weeks when another batch of young calves can be mothered on.
- Transitioning the weaned calves onto ad libitum meal prior to weaning is beneficial to minimise post weaning check.
- If pastures dry out, 1-2 calves per cow can be weaned to reduce the feed demand of the cows with remaining calves.
- Monitor cow live weight and take appropriate action if live weight is dropping.

Summer management

- Calves on nurse cows, grazing adequate high quality pasture maintain good growth rates over summer. Weight gains of 1 kg/calf/day are achievable.
- Ensure all normal animal health procedures are carried out and mineral status is adequate.
- DO NOT forget to monitor these cows and calves! Water and shade are important.

