

Vet of creatures great and small turns hand to calves

Natalie Campbell

A Waikato vet who has worked with everything from camels to mice is turning her hand to calf rearing this winter.

Vicki McLean, a veterinarian from Matamata Veterinary Services, and husband Craig are planning to rear at least 300 calves this year on their 6.8ha (17 acre) property.

Having bought the 6.8ha property last year complete with calf shed the couple decided to rear calves themselves.

She has reared small numbers before and says being a vet she has a natural interest in neonatal care.

They are hoping to rear at least 300 calves based on the 60m by 12m shed on their property, and all going well there could be room for a few more. The shed is divided into 12 pens with solid walls in between.

When it comes to selecting calves she won't be accepting "just anything". Deciding what end market you want to target should influence the type of calves bought for rearing.

She will be selling the calves at 100kg to bull finishers and hopes to source early born Friesian bulls. A handful of cross-breeds may also be considered.

The early born Friesian bull calves usually start life heavier and are considered to grow faster allowing her to sell them sooner.

"You have to think about your end market and then work backwards."

She says bull finishers can be quite specific about what they buy from rearers, which is why it's important to consider your end market.

Vicki, originally from California, has lived in New Zealand for the past 12 years. She has made the most of her contact with farmers through her job and has asked calf-rearing clients plenty of questions about markets and rearing methods. She has also done plenty of reading up information that is available in the public arena.

Vicki believes it is becoming harder for rearers to select the calves best suited to their end market because more farmers are choosing to rear their own. The increase in lifestyle block owners is seeing more people try their hand at it.

She has made the decision to use whey-based milk powder after rearing small numbers of calves previously on whey and whole milk powder and achieving similar results. It is also more economical than other powders.

On arrival the four-day-old calves will be given a warm electrolyte fluid before being fed twice a day for the first 10 days, then they will be fed once a day. Muesli and roughage (hay or silage) will be available at all times from day one to help develop and stimulate the rumen.

Vicki has made the decision to feed calves once a day after reading up research results from the Poukawa calf rearing project overseen by Dr Paul Muir and talking to farmers. The late spring calves she reared in the

past were gaining about 500g/day fed once a day topped up from grain and grass. However Vicki says when the calves move to once a day the milk replacer is fed at a higher concentration.

"I have done a lot of reading on it."

To start with she will be adding between 200-250g whey based powder to each of the two-2L feeds a day. Then when the calves are fed once a day they will be fed 2.5L of water with 250g added for each litre. But she says all calf feeds and supplements have recommendations printed on them, which she advises rearers to follow.

"I am going to feed 2 litres twice a day for ten days then drop it back to 2.5 litres a day, but I will put more powder to the litreage."

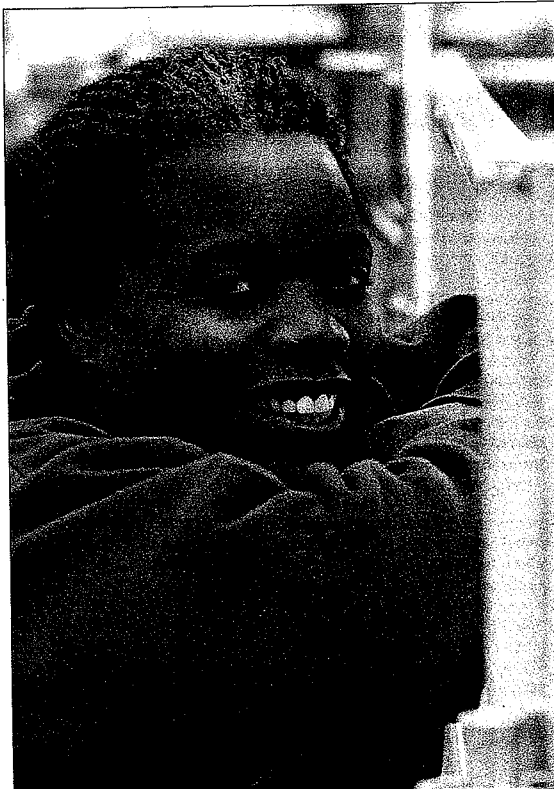
Her goal is to feed the calves at least 10% of their body weight a day.

Calf muesli (with a coccidiostat) will be made available from day one along with fresh clean water and the whey powder has an immune system stimulant. When calves are weaned off milk she will provide them with 1.5kg of ad-lib muesli which she hopes they will be eating by weaning. One kilogram provides the equivalent nutrients from 3.5 litres of milk to calves.

"So it's like feeding them milk twice a day."

Vicki says the muesli (18% protein) and calf pellets (20% protein) will also be fed.

She has calculated each calf will



Veterinarian Vicki McLean is rearing at least 300 calves this year and targeting bull finishers as her end market. She says knowing the desires of your target market is important to successful rearing.

consume 25kg whey based powder, 50kg of meal and 25kg pellets.

Based on last year's prices Vicki has budgeted to pay about \$110/four-day-old calf and allowed about \$140 each for feed.

"I believe I can do it for \$250-\$270 a calf." This includes the cost of replacement teats and other incidentals.

"If I can sell them for \$350-\$360 each that would be great."



Your first choice in Calf and Lamb Milk Replacers.



For more information please contact your local Wrightson or Williams & Kettle branch today or call our Customer Services Representatives on 0800 809 011.

