

Tokanui Research Farm to rear 500 heifer calves

Tokanui Research Farm will rear more than 500 calves this year using a high meal-low milk system designed to encourage rapid rumen development.

Formerly used for sheep and beef research, the farm has only reared dairy calves since last season and is presently making good use of a woolshed that once held up to 1500 sheep.

Farm manager Ken Jones says the calf rearing unit was designed with the help of local large-scale calf rearers, Ian and Donna Farrelly. Last year 600 calves were reared in the shed and the system worked so well that AgResearch's Flock House farm near Bulls is modelling its new calf rearing operation on Tokanui Farm.

Calf rearing manager Viv Oag says Tokanui will aim to wean calves earlier this year and will use a system based on calf rearing research at Poukawa.

Last year most calves were weaned off milk at eight weeks but this season the target will be six weeks, depending on

weight. Four-day-old calves will be fed four litres (a mixture of wholemilk and milk powder) twice a day up until two weeks old. Then they will go on to a once a day feed of two litres.

A diet of straw and meal will be fed from day one with meal rates gradually increasing to 1.5kg/calf.

Calves are housed inside up until six weeks of age, then they go outside on to pasture once weaned off milk at about 80kg liveweight. Meal feeding will continue up until about 12 weeks of age. By this stage the calves should weigh around 100kg.

Oag says she is aiming for a liveweight gain of .8kg/hd/day. She says lighter calves will be weaned later if necessary.

Tokanui's wholemilk is purchased from the New Zealand Milk Products factory in nearby Te Awamutu. A 6000 litre load is delivered to the farm every third or fourth day.

The calves are being reared for trial work or for Dexcel farms near Hamilton.



Tokanui Research Farm calf rearing manager Viv Oag will rear more than 500 calves this year using the Poukawa proven system.

Rearers should have electrolyte on hand

After a long truck journey it may be necessary to feed new arrivals an electrolyte.

There are many proprietary electrolytes available e.g. Dexolyte, Glycolyte and Vytrate.

Purchase of these in bulk can lead to serious savings e.g. 12kg of Dexolyte costs around \$135 – around \$0.68 per calf feed.

An emergency electrolyte mix, to be added to two litres of warm water, could also be fed to calves off the truck. It is not appropriate for prolonged feeding to sick calves, and is made up of 1/4 teaspoon salt, 1 tablespoon baking soda and four tablespoons of glucose/dextrose.

Calves must be checked for navel infections before they are picked up. Calves need to be re-checked for navel infections at least twice in the first week. Any problem calves should be identified with spray

marker and treated – this should be pre-organised in consultation with your veterinarian.

Calves that are problem/slow drinkers should be grouped into a separate pen for closer attention. Some calves may not drink from a teat initially because they have been trained to a bucket. Be prepared to tube feed – as any calf refusing to drink should be tube fed its allotted ration of electrolytes/milk.

Scouring young calves is the calf rearers biggest nightmare. There may be more than one causative agent and identification of the cause is often difficult.

Young calves which are scouring need to be fed electrolytes immediately to avoid dehydration. The number and timing of calves scouring is often a clue as to the cause.

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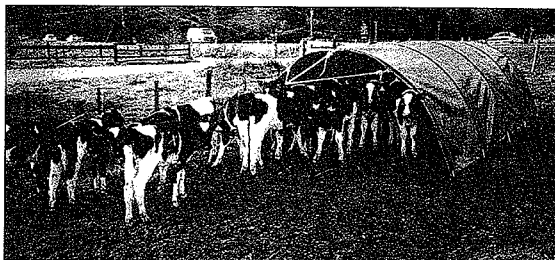
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