

## **A chance introduction to a new type of milk powder – originally purchased in error when the usual brand had run out – has formed the basis of a major change in calf rearing strategy on a Yorkshire farm. We found out what changes were made and why the results came as such a surprise.**

Anne Shaw admits that calf rearing had become a Cinderella enterprise at Grey Leys Farm in Elvington, near York.

“Yes, I was probably skimping the job,” she recalls. “It was inevitably done in a rush, and having to heat water twice a day always seemed to be a time-consuming chore that sometimes took second place to other jobs on the farm. “My husband David was often away from the farm [he’s chairman of the NFU North East Dairy Board and vice chairman of York East NFU] and we were under pressure staff-wise, and some of the bull calves occasionally only got fed once a day.”

But when David inadvertently returned home from the feed merchant with a different type of calf milk replacer – one that was only needed to be fed once a day – the couple both agreed that this would be a step too far.

“My immediate reaction was that we couldn’t possibly use it,” says Anne. “And David agreed that he would take the milk replacer back.”

But with the sack in the shed and the usual pressures of time ticking away, Anne eventually thought that she’d have to give it a go.

“It was amazing,” she says. “I was absolutely staggered. The calves didn’t just stay alive, they positively thrived. There was a real sharpness and brightness about them, scouring was virtually non-existent, and they were generally very content.

“So the next time he went to get feed, I was asking him to ‘please bring the same stuff’.”

The milk replacer was Shine Once-a-day from Bonanza Nutrition, which has gained a growing following across the UK since its introduction. And although it initially goes against the grain for many stockmen to cut their calves’ feed back to once-a-day, there is ample evidence to indicate that it’s actually doing them good.

The product’s success is down to its content of buttermilk, skimmed milk powder and its high levels of casein protein. This will form a curd in the calf’s abomasum, which takes over 14 hours to be digested and accounts for the calves’ feeling of fullness and contentment on just once-a-day feeding.

This contrasts with other powders that don’t contain buttermilk or skim, are largely based on whey and are unsuitable for once-a-day feeding because they contain none of the casein protein which is responsible for forming the curd. They therefore pass far more rapidly through the calf’s system.

“On reflection, I honestly think I was over-feeding the calves before,” says Anne. “They are only small Jerseys – weighing around 25-30kg at birth – and trying to get that extra half bottle of milk into them was probably too much. “It might have been alright if I’d fed at regular 12 hourly intervals, but of course that doesn’t happen.”

In fact, the routine had been to provide the first feed after the morning milking when the colostrum was available for the very young calves, which could have been at any time up to around 11.30am.

“The second feed definitely wouldn’t have been 12 hours later, although it could have been as late as 8 or 9pm,” she says

“Today, the calf rearing enterprise – which is an important part of the 320 cow pedigree Jersey business and accounts for all herd replacements as well as heifers for sale and cross-bred bull beef – has undergone a whole series of changes for the better.

“For a start, feeding just once a day has given me the time to do the job properly,” says Anne. “I mix religiously according to the instructions and at exactly the right temperature and in the right proportions.

“After three days on twice-a-day colostrum, the powder is introduced on day four, firstly in very small quantities and still using a bottle, and then with a bucket from day seven onwards.

“They’re soon drinking 2.5 to three litres a day, while fresh creep and water are also offered from day four and straw is available



**Anne Shaw and Joe Murphy discussing calf rearing at Grey ley farm in Yorkshire.**

ad lib.”

Significant changes have also been made to the housing, which Anne believes has added to the improvements.

“We’d had an outbreak of cryptosporidiosis in the past which had had a serious impact on calf mortality – at one point taking it up to 25 percent,” she recalls. “The traditional building had just become calf sick and it was impossible to really muck it out adequately.

“The solution had been not only to treat for cryptosporidiosis routinely as a precaution for seven days from birth with Halocur, but perhaps, more importantly, to break its cycle of infection by moving the calves to hutches.

“The hutches have worked really well,” she says. “They are easy to clean and all we do is turn them in winter to face a wall of straw bales to stop north wind, and turn them back in summer.”

With calf mortality now down to two percent, growth rates up and little evidence of scours or pneumonia, no one is more surprised than Anne at the changes that have taken place.

“I’ve been 40 years a dairy farmer, and to change to once-a-day now is simply unbelievable,” she says. “I really am impressed and would never change back – unless something unforeseen and disastrous happened. “To us the system has been priceless,” she says. “We’ve got happy calves – and lots of them – and I am happy too.”

For more information visit the Bonanza CalfNutrition website [www.bonanzacalf.ie](http://www.bonanzacalf.ie) or ring Joe Murphy on 07500 944581. You can also contact your local John Thompsons rep or store or phone 02890 351321