

CALVES THRIVE ON THE CONSISTENT PERFORMANCE OF SHINE ONCE-A-DAY



Calf rearing at a North Tipperary dairy farm has been transformed by introducing a system of feeding milk replacer once a day.

Jerry Moloney, who runs a herd of 98 pedigree Holsteins at Nenagh, Co Tipperary, first used Shine Once-A-Day to reduce time and labour in feeding his heifer replacements.

Jerry achieved both but found many other benefits too. Cases of scour, which calves had experienced when they were fed whole milk, have been eliminated. Jerry puts this down to feed consistency among other reasons. "Calves thrive on consistency," he insists.

Calves also eat more straw and concentrates on the once-a-day feeding system; by weaning at 8–10 weeks they are consuming up to 2kg of concentrates daily.

Newborn calves are bottle-fed four litres of colostrum as soon as possible. For the first five days they receive three litres of transition milk before Shine is introduced, twice daily at this point, at 600g/day, rising to 750g/day over the course of a week.

To eat, calves constantly have access to fresh straw and an 18% blend or coarse ration and plenty of fresh water.

Feeding isn't the only component of the rearing system that protects calf health at Jerry's farm.

Small groups and hygienic pens play a big part in maintaining a high health status; no more than 10 calves are ever housed in a single

pen. Initially, they are in groups of three and move into groups of six to 10 in the first week. All pens are straw-bedded and kept dry between weekly clean-outs.

Calves are weaned by gradually reducing over 7–10 days the volume of milk replacer fed. At this stage calves weigh 100kg and are thriving, says Jerry.

Calves are not turned out before weaning because Jerry says they perform better indoors; calving gets underway on February 1st and calves are turned out to grass in early April.

Once outdoors, calves are fed after-grass in a 'leader-follower' rotational system with heifers until early June. Paddocks are changed every five to seven days. Until early June, 1.5kg of 18% blend is fed.

Heifers are housed on December 1st with a continuation of the 1.5kg blend for one month, together with baled silage. Jerry's motto is 'fit not fat' so, after a month, heifers receive grass silage only, until they go into the parlour in the first week of February the following year.

He has a strict vaccination and worming programme to combat the threat of worms and coccidial diseases; calves are also given a mineral bolus to ensure they have a sufficient level of trace elements.

Jerry's system is predominantly grass-based and he is achieving excellent results. By the end of this milk year, the combined average milk yield average for cows and heifers will be 7,200 litres at 550 kg solids on grass and 1,200 kg of concentrates.

There is a rigid 12-week breeding season for cows, and seven weeks for heifers. Any cows that fail to conceive in this period are moved on.



Dr Christine Cummins (Bonanza calf Nutrition) and Jerry Moloney

Heifers consistently calve at 23–24 months. In 2016, the empty rate of both heifers and cows inclusive was 6%.

Jerry believes that if a dairy farmer can get the first six months right, they will hit targets and calve heifers down at the right age.

"With Shine Once-A-Day this is possible for all heifers because they are hitting their target weights," says Jerry. "This year, the calves weighed an average of 220kg in the September weighing. Shine Once-A-Day has really transformed calf rearing."



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