

# Compumate outperforms the best of the rest

**Calf rearing standards at a Cheshire dairy farm are so high that the hygiene and feeding regimes are near comparable to those found on a hospital ward.**

The matron in charge of this particular unit is Karen Halton who, with her husband, Tom, runs two herds at two sites - Chance Hall Farm and Townsend Farm – near Congleton.

At Chance Hall Farm, the system was switched from an all-year-round calving pattern to an autumn block last year.

With 200 calves born in this block, Karen wanted to make certain the animals were getting the right level of nutrition to give them the very best start in life.

She had been using a high protein milk replacer but noticed that the calves' coats were very dull.

Karen decided to trial Compumate on the computerised feeding system and hasn't looked back. "It has given the calves more growing power. They are thriving on Compumate and the dull coat situation has disappeared," she reports.

"These calves are our future. The heifers are money in the tank and the beef calves money in the bank. If we look after them well from day one they will pay us back many times over and getting the nutrition right is central to that."

The herd of Swedish Red, Montbéliarde and Holstein crossbreeds start calving in August.

Cows calve in a calving box and the heifer calves are immediately transferred to single pens. To prevent any potential Johne's issues, the dam's number is displayed in the pen with the calf.

Calves are fed the dam's colostrum for up to seven days. A colostrometer is used to test the quality of the milk and if that quality isn't high enough the calves are given a replacement colostrum instead.

Joe Murphy, of Bonanza, the company that manufactures Compumate, said that because the product is made with skim milk it is digested in the same way as cow's milk.

From days five and seven, the calves are transferred to another shed where they are hand-reared on Compumate until Karen is absolutely certain they are ready to move into a communal pen and onto the machine feeding system following vaccination.

"The calves have to be consistently drinking well and strong enough not to be pushed around. I make sure they are up to it before they join the others," she said.

"They spend between 10 and 14 days on the teat



**Above:** Karen Halton and Joe Murphy (Bonanza Calf Nutrition).

**Left:** Karen Halton and Selina Field (Calf Specialist, Witter Farm Supplies)



rearing system but they can go to 20 days, it is whatever it takes." They also get a pellet formulated to guard against coccidiosis and a mineral lick designed to prevent respiratory illnesses taking hold.

Compumate is non-hydroscopic so there is no build-up of powder in the machine. "The powder is very fine and mixes really well," says Karen.

The Haltons aim to calve the heifers at two years old. Karen takes great pride in her rearing system and the results speak for themselves. Calf health is in excellent shape and daily liveweight gains in the first 12 weeks are 1kg. "I am a perfectionist, I like to get things right and to do my best," says Karen.

Beef calves are reared in communal pens from the outset. For these calves Karen reconstitutes

the fresh milk and water at a total concentration of 20%. "The volume is the same but the concentration increases," she explains. "They get three litres in the morning and afternoon and if the temperature falls to 0 degrees C or below they get 3.5 litres. Basically they have as much as they want to drink."

The fresh milk is pumped from the parlour through a pipeline to the calf shed. When temperatures are low or if there is a shortage of antibiotic milk, warm water is added to the milk and Compumate added to give it the right feed value.

"When you go back to basics and really put the effort in with every aspect of the rearing stage, including the nutrition, it creates longevity in the animal. The calves have to be well looked after as this influences the future performance of the herd."

## Compumate®

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