



# Why focus on early calf feeding?

## Extra grams gained early translate into extra litres later

Efforts made to optimise growth and development during the first phase of a dairy calf's life pay off later in the milk-producing phase. Every additional gram of gain achieved in calfhood can provide an extra future milk production of as much as 1 kg/cow/day. In addition, overall calf rearing cost can also be reduced considerably.

Dairy farmers often focus most on optimising nutrition for their milk-producing cows because this has a measurable impact on actual milk production. However, while it's important all cows and calves receive a balanced diet, the effects on performance that can be achieved through feed will be limited in older cows because they will have already reached their genetic potential. The first 400 days of a calf's life determine this.

Each cow has a unique genetic potential, which is determined to a large extent by its breeding. However, to reach their maximum potential, calves need optimal support from nutrition and care right from the start of their lives. Other factors that influence the extent to which the cow can reach its maximal

genetic potential include:

- Nutrition
- Health
- Calf management (hygiene, housing, veterinary treatment etc.)

All these elements should be optimised throughout the animal's lifetime from birth. Although this may sound straightforward, it is not always adhered to in practice. Many farmers still focus on investing in products aimed at optimising the performance of milk-producing cows.

### A lifetime of efficiency

Of course, it's not impossible to increase milk production at a later age. However, this takes much more input than optimising nutrition in a young calf towards enabling it to achieve its gene-

tic potential later on in life. If the cow was not optimally fed as a calf, it will not be able to reach the level of production that was once genetically possible, even though production later in life can be increased slightly.

### What and how to feed calves?

All around the world, scientists, nutritionists, and farmers continuously research bovine development and performance. One of the questions most thoroughly investigated is: What is the best feed regime for calves for optimal development? One common misconception is that 'nothing is better for calves than cow's milk'. For calves to develop as quickly and as well as possible, their specific nutritional needs can be better met by high quality milk-replacers than

by normal cows' milk. The graph on the right is based on NRC formulas for calf-growth based on protein and energy intake, and shows that even in the first 35 days of life, feeding calf milk-replacers can add more than five kilograms extra body weight per calf.

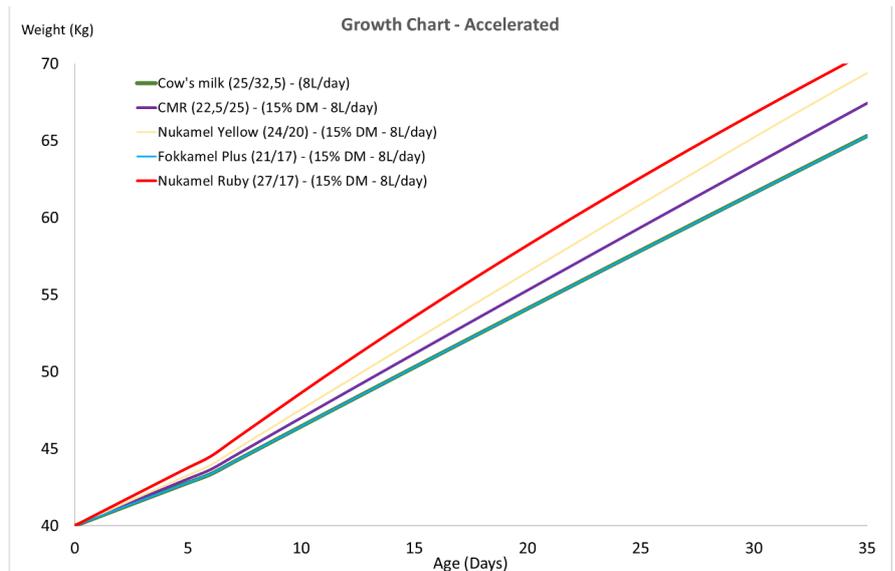
Alongside increased body weight, a top-quality calf milk-replacer supports development of a taller frame and stimulates dry matter intake, which enables optimal development of the rumen.

The trial was performed using an accelerated feed strategy, which resulted in faster development of the calf.

Faster development means the cow enters the conception and first lactation phase earlier. In this case, up to one month earlier, reducing the cost of raising the calf by approximately €2 per calf, per day, or €60 per calf over the month.

## Heavier, and healthier calves

Feeding a top quality calf milk replacer has even more benefits than just elevate the daily gain and decreasing



## Reducing the rearing cost with 60 Euro per calf.

the rearing period. It also helps to have healthier calves, reducing the mortality, the number of veterinary treatments and antibiotics. Apart from positive effects on the animal's welfare, this also has a positive influence on health later in life, and on the costs of the first period.

Research shows that farmers can save up to 50% per calf on veterinary costs, when they use a top-quality calf milk-replacer and an accelerated feeding strategy.

## The return on investment

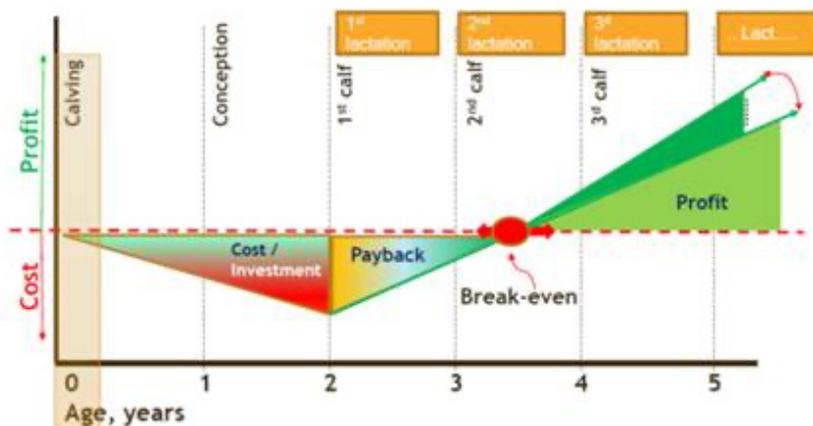
Top-quality products cost a little more. However, the additional cost of feeding a top-quality CMR with an accelerated feeding strategy result in:

- lower feeding costs.
- lower veterinary costs.
- earlier first lactation.
- higher milk production of up to 800 litres/cow.

The graph below shows that this strategy not only leads to an earlier breakeven, but more importantly, to a considerably higher turnover per cow. The exact return on investment also depends upon other factors (such as calf management, the breed of the cow, or labour costs). However, the benefits for farmers are clear and scientifically proven.

## Why focus on early calf feeding?

Economic aspects/increased efficiency of gain



If you would you like to learn more about our top-quality calf milk-replacer, accelerated feeding strategies, or how Nukamel can support your calf management, please contact us.

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