



When is a calf ready to wean?

What do the experts say?

In nature calf weaning is a long and gradual process. In the agricultural industry this process needs to be as short as possible. But what is achievable? And how? Some trust their ‘gut feeling’, some follow the recommendations of their feed supplier. Nukamel bases its advice on hard scientific evidence. Due to our cooperation with several scientific institutions, we can give you the best advice.

Weaning is a process to support the calves in their transition from a mono-gastric animal to a functional ruminating animal. To become a functional ruminating animal, with the potential of a high-performance heifer, it is key to support the development of the rumen in the right way.

Rumen proliferation is supported by the liquid diet, but certainly needs the intake of calf starter, water, and structured roughage (limited) for onset of development. As numerous studies showed calves that are not or limited offered starter feed will not develop rumen function. There is a need for readily fermentable nutrients for the development of microbi-

ota, rumen papillae and complete rumen metabolism. This should be combined with a limited amount of structured roughage for the rumen wall development, cleaning the rumen wall and salvation.

Starter feed before weaning

That said, it is clear we need intake of starter feed, water, and structured roughage before we can wean the calf. And the intake should be of the order that the nutrient need of the calf can be fulfilled by the intake of nutrients of starter feeds only.

What the nutrient need is partly depends on the growth rate. The growth rate itself is depended on the growth

realized on intake of CMR to avoid a drop in growth and development of your calf after weaning. But also known is that higher intakes of CMR can decrease intake of starter.

When to take away the milk?

To have a good weaning process we must understand this transition. But more importantly we have to look at the individual or group intake of solid feed to determine the moment to take away the milk, rather than following a timed schedule on age. Of course, feeding schedules form a perfect guidance, that should be adapted to intakes and situation to offer the right support for 95% of your calves.

The Guidant feeding schedule with the Nukamel milk replacer pays attention to a gradually decline in milk allowance. Although, on the other hand, we see in the field that a practical implementation on farm, due to time management or housing ability, can be a reason to deviate. Our Calf specialists can help by offering practical solution in optimizing your weaning strategies.

Intake at weaning

But what should be the intake at weaning? The intake of calf starter should be depending on the CMR allowance 1.5-2.0kg (conventional vs accelerated CMR feeding schedule).

Realizing we have to offer the calf starter as soon as from seven days of age, within the first week it will only be an introduction. Real intake will start from an age of around 4-8 weeks, depending on milk allowances.

Reducing milk allowances will increase starter intake, but too low milk allowances will force the calf to eat starter feed when it's not ready yet. This could lead to excessive starter intake and rumen disorders.



Key element for successful weaning

What are key elements for a successful weaning? Avoid abrupt and big changes, measure intakes. Support the weaning process with gradually declining milk intake, this can be in different ways,

but our advice is to have at least 3 steps of 4-7 days, starting no earlier than 6 weeks of age. With elevated CMR allowances, it is advised to have

more steps. A gradually decline does not only offer a stimulation for solid feed intake, but also declines stress a forgotten factor influencing calf immunity.

Measurements should be practical and can't be precise, but we can measure the difference in intake of a couple of hundred grams and 2kg, simply by checking the amount we offer and not the times the bucket is emptied. Of course in group housing age differences will play a role, but increase of intakes will be certainly noticed if the group ages increases.

Look at your calves

Last but not least, look at your calves. Are your calves losing their nice hair-coat, and turning into long haired dull animals, losing body condition and incidence of pneumonia in the month after weaning high or increasing? Look back at your weaning strategy.

Would you like to learn more about our top quality CMR, weaning, the accelerated feeding strategy or how Nukamel can support your calf management, please contact us.

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