

# DAIRY PIPELINE

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## MAKING IT PAY!

Traditional preweaning feeding programs have limited milk or milk replacer to encourage starter intake and early weaning as a means of reducing daily feed cost. More recently, research and experience by dairy producers has shown that the practice of feeding calves more milk or milk replacer before weaning has a positive impact on growth. However, given the current economic conditions, what are the benefits to offset these higher feed costs?

First, a higher liquid feeding rate during the first four weeks of life improves feed efficiency as a lower proportion of nutrients are devoted to body growth. This makes each pound of gain cost less. Second, many studies have shown that higher milk or milk replacer feeding rates are associated with higher milk production during the first lactation. This is encouraging but when milk prices are low, we want to see positive economic returns sooner rather than later. A third advantage appears to be an improved immune response to feeding more milk or milk replacer during the preweaning period. This can result in lower treatment cost, less labor to treat sick calves, lower culling rates and possibly an additional milk response from healthier cows.

Workers at Texas Tech University compared the response of calves fed either a low plane of nutrition (1 lb. of milk solids) or a high plane of nutrition (1.8 lb. the first week and 2.4 lb. through 54 days of age) to a Bovine Herpesvirus and Mannheimia challenge at 81 and 84 days of age. (As a reference 1 lb. of milk solids

equals about a gallon of milk and 2.4 lb. of milk solids is more than 2 gallons). All calves were weaned at 70 days of age. Calves fed the low plane of nutrition had lower blood glucose and mobilized more body fat during the challenge which indicated a more severe response to these respiratory challenges. In another study on a commercial calf ranch, sale barn calves in which more than 75% were colostrum deprived, were fed either 1 lb. of milk solids from a 20:20 milk replacer or 1.8 to 2.4 lb. of milk solids from a 28:20 milk replacer. Calves were weaned at 57 days. Although the calves fed more liberally had more bloat and looser manure there were no differences in health treatments. More liberally fed calves gained 1.2 lb. / day during the first 25 days vs. .2 lb. / day for the calves fed the 20:20 milk replacer. These advantages in body weight gain persisted throughout the study. The more liberally fed calves had higher feed efficiency (1.7 vs. 5.8 feed: gain ratio) for the first 25 days of life and over the term of the study (2.2 vs. 3.3 feed: gain). This later study demonstrated that higher feeding rates don't predispose calves to more digestive disease.

More liberal feeding programs for calves based upon intakes of higher protein milk replacers or whole milk result in great body weight gains, improved feed efficiency, better health and improved first lactation milk yield when included in a well-designed feeding program for the postweaned dairy heifer.

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## Upcoming Events

See [VTDairy](#) for details.

### September 22, 2015

Milk Marketing/MPP  
Workshop w/ Gonzalo  
Ferreira & Jim Pease  
Harrisonburg

### September 23-26

[Franklin County Agricultural  
Fair Pet & Livestock Show](#)

### September 25, 2015

State Fair Jr. Dairymen's  
Contest

### September 27-30, 2015

National 4-H Dairy Conf.

### Sept. 29-Oct. 3, 2015

[World Dairy Expo](#)

### October 17, 2015

Virginia Tech Showcase Sale

### October 28, 2015

Reproduction Workshop

### November 11, 2015

Dairy Management  
Workshop-Harrisonburg

### November 2015 & January 2016

[Holistic Management & Risk  
Assessment Workshops for  
Dairy Farmers in the Southern  
Region \(Workshops 1 & 2\)](#)

#### Workshop 1

Nov. 4, 2015—Amelia Co.  
Nov. 6, 2015—Franklin Co.  
Nov. 11, 2015—Rockingham  
Nov. 13, 2015—Smyth Co.

#### Workshop 2

Jan. 20, 2016—Amelia Co.  
Jan. 22, 2016—Franklin Co.  
Jan. 27, 2016—Rockingham  
Jan. 29, 2016—Smyth Co.

### March 8-11, 2016

Area Dairy Conferences

*If you are a person with a disability and require any auxiliary aids, services or other accommodations for any Extension event, please discuss your accommodation needs with the Extension staff at your local Extension office at least 1 week prior to the event.*

## HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW: HANDLING THE BIG CHALLENGES

A dairy farmer must be ready for the unexpected. Every day farmers are challenged by variable milk and feed prices, forage production and all of the details associated with herd management. With so many daily details to attend to, the big picture can sometime gets lost in the shuffle. It's necessary to think about the uncontrollable and unexpected. Could you handle an event so large that it might change the way you do business? What if our area were to suffer from hotter than normal temperatures, drought, torrential rain and flooding, or any natural disaster? Even something as simple as mice eating electrical wiring can lead to a serious fire. Could you handle the next steps? Prepare BEFORE disaster strikes, not during or after. There may be advance warning that gives you the time necessary to prepare. Then again, maybe not.

Recently, a Wisconsin farm suffered a fire and in June a Michigan farm was destroyed by a tornado. During their time of need, people from all over came to help gather up cows to move them to a safe area. What if you lost your entire parlor to fire or tornado, do you have a plan in place to make sure animals can continue to be milked? Along with the daily grind of running a farm, every farmer needs to have plans in place for catastrophic events. Some of the most important plans should be:

- ◆ Unexpected loss of a family member or employee—delegation tree—who is next in charge
- ◆ Fire and rescue plan—for each area on your farm
- ◆ Flooding
- ◆ Tornado

With each plan you must identify how you can continue to survive if you experience the following:

- ◆ Loss of a parlor
- ◆ Loss of animal housing
- ◆ Loss of animals
- ◆ Loss of Equipment
- ◆ Loss of feed
- ◆ Loss of housing for family and employees

When assembling all the primary and secondary plans, one important component is future impact. Any one unexpected event can have a detrimental impact on animal health ultimately affecting milk production.

Is your farm ready for the unexpected emotionally, physically and financially?

Consider establishing a farm advisory team to help prepare. Even today with low milk prices, a farm advisory team that meets periodically can help the farm prepare for daily changes...and the unexpected.

A farm advisory team made up of the key farm family members, employees, veterinarian, accountant or loan officer, nutritionist, and a local extension agent can help improve your business today and be invaluable when misfortune pays a call.

—Cynthia Martel  
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“Even today with low milk prices, a farm advisory team that meets four times a year or every month can help you prepare for daily changes...and the unexpected.”

*For more information on Dairy Extension or to learn about current programs, visit us at VTDairy —Home of the Dairy Extension Program at: [www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu](http://www.vtdairy.dasc.vt.edu).*

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