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Getting the nutrition package right to optimise your herd's life performance

DAIRY farmers seeking to optimise their herd's life time performance should place greater focus on calf nutrition, according to Bill May of XL Vets and Lambert, Leonard and May.

"Between birth and weaning, a calf demonstrates the highest feed conversion efficiency of any stage of its life, so getting the nutrition package right has to be one of the best investments," he said.

"The optimum calving age for total lifetime performance is 22.5 to 23.5 months, therefore to achieve satisfactory weight and condition at first calving, a good start is absolutely essential for all heifer replacements."

So what's the recipe for success? A survey of over 200 farmers carried out in spring by Volac International highlighted that more than 60 per cent offered their calves wholemilk, a feed that is far from ideal, according to the company's technical manager, Maggie Gould.

"Wholemilk is inconsistent in quality and can spread dis-

Five-point plan

Bill May's five-point plan for feeding milk replacer.



- 1 QUALITY** Choose a milk replacer with a consistent formulation of quality ingredients that matches your system. For example, offer high performance heifers more of a higher protein:lower oil formulation and beef cross calves a lower level of a more economic replacer.
- 2 FREQUENCY** Feed twice a day and forget the labour savings achieved by the once a day routine. Twice daily feeding provides twice as much opportunity to observe calf behaviour and identify any signs of disease at the earliest possible stage.
- 3 TEMPERATURE** Feed milk replacer at body temperature (around 38degC) to ensure effective closure of the oesophageal groove, which directs liquid feed straight into the abomasum.
- 4 CONVENIENCE** Milk replacer can be conveniently stored as a dry, relatively stable product rather than a perishable liquid. The hassle of storing and handling whole milk has to be set against the costs of setting up a mixing and warming facility.
- 5 DISEASE** Disease risk, especially spreading Johne's, can be reduced greatly by proper pasteurisation of whole milk prior to feeding or by using certain milk replacers.

ease from dam to calf," she said. "In fact, the survey findings also indicated that calf health is the biggest problem farmer's face when rearing calves.

"Furthermore research at Myerscough College concluded that calves fed wholemilk weighed almost 15 per cent less at weaning compared to those fed milk replacer."