

A Guide to Rearing Your Calf

Calves for Agricultural Day must be born after 1 June and must be more than six weeks old on the day.

It is best to buy a calf that is at least 4 days old so it has been well fed on colostrum. Look for small dry navels, pricked up ears, firm faeces, clear bright eyes, moist noses, shiny coats (breed dependant), firm teeth and playful movements. Take note of your calf's date of birth as this is required on your entry form.

If a bull calf is chosen he should be rung with a rubber ring within the first 3 weeks to become a steer. Calves are not eligible for Group Day if they have not been steered.

On Agricultural Day calves are judged on type – this is either dairy or beef. Beef is also split between heavy and light breeds. Dairy breeds include Jersey Friesian and Ayrshire heifers. Heavy breeds include beef crosses, jersey steers Friesian steers.

Approximate Rearing Needs

2-3 10kg bags of Milk Powder

Pellets or meal from 1 week old

Halter and lead

Brush

Drench

Vaccine

Cover

Calf teats are available that attach to a coke bottle, or a complete re-usable bottle and teat can be purchased. A calf feeder may be used or the calf can be fed from a bucket.

The calf must not be reared on its mother or a foster mother.

Feeding

Calf milk powders are available from farming outlet stores. Choose a brand that contains an anticoccidial. Cheaper brands can potentially provide less nutrients which will affect the growth of your calf. Mixing and feeding instructions are clearly written on the milk powder bag. Once your calf is drinking well feed at the upper limits of the recommendation so it grows well. For best results milk feed your calf twice a day until Ag Day. Supplement the milk with calf meal to encourage rumen development. Chaffage or hay can also be offered. Ensure your calf has access to fresh, clean water every day. Allow it to graze on reasonably long grass everyday once it is over two weeks of age.

Prevention of Scours

Ensure your calf has had at least 2 litres of colostrum within 6 hours of birth.

House in a dry, draught free, hygienic shed.

Avoid sudden changes in the type, quantity or temperature of milk or milk powder.

Scours – if your calf scours –

DAY ONE – stop feeding milk and keep your calf off milk for 24 hours. Feed it two litres of electrolyte mix three times daily to keep it hydrated. (Electrolyte mix is available in small pack sizes from your local farm store or vet).

Keep it in a clean, dry, draught free environment and keep warm (put a cover on it).

The vast majority of calf scours are viral or protozoal origin and so antibiotics are not needed. However if your calf has blood in the scour, or where there is severe depression, or calves that are less than 5 days old antibiotics may be needed. In these cases a consultation with your vet will be required.

DAY TWO – If your calf is still scouring after 24 hours feed it 2 litres of electrolyte, followed 20-30 minutes later by 1-1.5 litres of milk. Repeat 2 times daily until scouring resolves at which point stop the electrolytes.

If your calf stops sucking it is seriously ill. Consult your vet.

Vaccination and Drenching

Your calf should be vaccinated with a 5 in 1 vaccine at six weeks of age and then given a booster shot at 12 weeks. This vaccine prevents pulpy kidney, tetanus, black disease, malignant oedema and blackleg.

Drench for worms from 6-8 weeks old unless otherwise advised by your vet. Pour-ons (down the back bone – from the base of the neck to top of tail) are the easiest method. Other options are oral or injected. If applying pour-on it is best to sit the calf on its tail and apply from the brisket to the groin to avoid the risk of coat damage.

Lice Control

Lice are a common problem. The pour-on drenches also control lice, but it is necessary to brush the lice eggs from the coat. Washing with Asuntol at twice weekly intervals (ensure your calf does not get cold) plus brushing is also effective. If your calf gets lice you will also have to wash its cover and brush in Asuntol. Keep infected calves and gear away from other calves.

Housing Requirements

A good clean, dry and draught free environment is required for optimum health. A cover will assist in your calf's growth as it will not be using energy to keep warm.

Daily Care

Feed your calf twice a day for best growth. Wash its face to remove any milk residue. Walk it on a halter and lead and spend time with it. Brush it at least once a day.

DeHorning

Certain cattle breeds will grow horns. These can be dealt with quite easily and inexpensively when the calf is young. A vet will be able to advise you on different methods, how humane they are and which are the most effective.

Points to Remember

Ensure that long hair under the tail is kept clean so no dags form.

Do not clip or shave your calf – it will be disqualified.

Brush your calf often to get a nice shiny coat and to remove loose hair.

Ensure the halter is loosened regularly or removed so it is not too tight otherwise it will wear the hair off around the neck.

When leading your calf stand beside the left shoulder of the calf at all times. The right hand should grip the lead palm upwards and be approximately 15 centimetres from the halter. The left hand should grip the lead, knuckles upward. Try to keep the calf moving at a reasonable pace ensuring that you walk at the same pace as your calf.

Paperwork

Prior to Agricultural Day you will be given an Animal Status Declaration form. It needs to be completed and kept with you on Agricultural Day. Please do not return it to school. There is no requirement under the NAIT Act to register stock movement. School Agricultural Days are exempt due to the small number of animals, short distances travelled and the young age of the animals involved.

On Agricultural Day

Wash your calf on or before Ag Day (ensure it doesn't get cold) and take a bucket, brushes and an old towel to clean it if it is dirty when you arrive. Parents are able to assist with this. Take the calf's food and water requirements for the day.

Depending on the number of entries and at the discretion of the animal committee, children may be grouped in three age groups - senior 11, 12 & 13 year olds, intermediate 8, 9 & 10 year olds and junior 5, 6 & 7 year olds. They will be judged on leading, rearing and type.

The leading course is the same one used at the Franklin Central Group Day. It is advisable not to start using the leading course until closer to Agricultural Day as your calf may become bored and uncooperative. Actions which could incur penalties during the leading competition are: touching or slapping the calf with the hand, jerking the halter, releasing the grip on the rope with the right hand at any time, allowing the end of the rope to trail on the ground, elbowing the calf or buffeting it with your hip.

For the rearing the judge is looking for a healthy appearance – evidence of correct feeding, clean and pliable skin, absence of skin parasites and a calf that is well groomed from head to tail.

When calves are judged for type, they are judged against the standard for each particular breed.