

## Once-A-Day Feeding: Milk Replacer Cost Savings

**UK - Only 15 per cent of large dairy farms are currently capitalising on the significant benefits of once-a-day milk feeding, yet the practice can save around £40 per calf and cut labour input in half without compromising animal health and performance.**

This startling statistic comes from an independent survey of 300 dairy farmers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, commissioned by Bonanza Calf Nutrition in March. The findings highlight the tremendous potential for the industry to make significant calf rearing cost and labour savings, according to Tom Warren from Bonanza.

“These latest survey findings reveal that a majority of farmers (57 per cent) are still bucket feeding their calves. Just over 30 per cent are using teated feeders – although this figure rises to over 40 per cent in larger 200-cow plus herds – with only seven per cent taking advantage of automatic or computerised feeders. With so many farmers feeding calves manually, I think the UK industry is missing a trick by not moving wholesale into once-a-day feeding,” he says.

Mr Warren continues to discuss the positive research around once-a-day feeding but points out how many rearers are deterred from the system as they believe feeding in one go is not healthy for the calves and that they would be hungry later in the day. He states however that these “are all misconceptions.”

For once-a-day feeding to work, Mr Warren points out that rearers must use whole milk or a milk replacer based on skim milk powder. This is necessary as it allows for the product to form a cheesy curd or clot in the calf’s stomach that takes over 14 hours to be digested, allowing for the calf to remain contented throughout the day. “Farmers who try the system for the first time are often sceptical, but as soon as they see the performance benefits and reconcile these with the cost and labour savings, they’re converted for good,” he says.

Bonanza Calf Nutrition points out that this clot forms using casein protein produced in the cow's udder specifically for the calf. "Milk replacers that claim to contain milk, but make no reference to skim milk powder or buttermilk are unsuitable for once-a-day feeding because they contain no casein protein. These products are usually based on whey and vegetable proteins and are flushed through the calf's digestive system in only a few hours, so are wholly unsuitable for a once-a-day feeding regime," Mr Warren says.

"In addition, calves fed once-a-day on cow's milk need to be two weeks old before starting the regime unless a skim-based replacer is mixed with the whole milk to increase the solids content of the feed."

He adds that choice of fat and fat level in a specialist once-a-day milk replacer is also important. "By including high quality skimmed milk in our Shine replacers we do not need to push up fat levels. A high fat content tends to slow the movement of the milk through the digestive system – which at first sight might seem helpful for a once-a-day system – but high fat levels will delay dry feed intake and weaning, which you don't want. But by incorporating four vegetable oils along with the natural milk emulsifiers found in buttermilk you can improve fat digestion and encourage dry feed intake.

"With the right milk replacer, a once-a-day feeding system works fantastically well for both the calf and the rearer. Quite apart from the obvious labour benefits, calves eat more dry feed and their rumens develop more quickly. This allows weaning to occur a week or two earlier, saving the farmer even more time, as well as cutting the amount of milk replacer used. Compared with a twice daily feeding regime, we estimate once-a-day will save at least 4kg in milk replacer worth at least £6 per calf, and cut labour input on UK calf rearing units to as little as 23 seconds per calf per day," he claims.

Tom Warren, Bonanza Calf Nutrition May 10, 2011