

Just a selection of new products and ideas to aid calf rearing

# Tapes and temptation

We profile a winter warmer and a weighing solution, as well as some research on flavoured water, that should help you to ensure that you get your calves off to a flying start and keep them on track to meet age-at-first-calving target.

text **Rachael Porter**

## Wrap them up warm!

Calf jackets could be the answer if you're using large open buildings, to maximise ventilation, to rear young stock, but also want to protect them from the winter chills. Calves can be subject to considerable temperature changes in just a few hours – typically 12°C between day and night.

“So the biggest problem is how to keep the calves at a comfortable body temperature without restricting airflow or increasing humidity while, at the same time, maintaining a feeding regime to promote growth in cold weather without giving them scours,” says CosyCalf’s Mandy Turner, who developed the idea for the UK after spending almost 20 years rearing calves.

“Using calf jackets is routine in some countries and not only does it improve feed conversion efficiency because less energy is diverted from growth to keep the animal warm, it also reduces the risk of pneumonia and scours from chills,” she adds.

Made from breathable and water-repellent material, the jackets are machine washable at 30°C. They fit calves up to 100kg in weight and have one chest fastener, two adjustable belly straps and two adjustable leg straps.

The jackets cost £20 each or £18 each plus VAT for orders of 25 or more.



## ‘Sweet’ water to tempt calves

Calves like caramel – or at least caramel-flavoured water. They drank significantly more of it in a study that looked at the impact of flavoured water on the performance and health of Jersey calves from birth through to weaning.

“Calves on the caramel treatment drank a large amount of water, but this did not correspond to an increase in dry feed intake,” Essex-based Writtle College’s Nicola Blackie, who led the trials, told delegates at the British Society of Animal Science’s annual conference. “But this increased water intake may be beneficial to producers, particularly hot countries, to encourage calves to drink, which will help them to cool down.”

Water is essential for calf growth and development and is important to promote solid feed intake. Calves which were not given access to water in a study showed reduced weight gains and a 31% reduction in starter intake. Significant correlations between water intake and liveweight gains and calf starter intakes have been shown.

Calf starter intake is related to liveweight gain and has important implications for rumen development.

“So methods to promote water intake in calves have the potential to improve starter intake and therefore reduce setbacks at weaning. This can have a positive impact on overall calf performance,” said Dr Blackie, explaining the rationale behind her work.

## Band to monitor calf growth rate

A weigh band that allows producers with Holstein Friesian calves to measure and monitor growth rates, and subsequently help to meet the two-year calving target, has been launched by Volac.

Developed by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) based on DARD and AgriSearch funded research, and supported by the Royal Veterinary College (RVC), the tape has been calibrated to provide a good estimate of calf weight in kilogrammes. Calves should be weighed at birth and again at six months as a minimum.

“Growth has a direct effect on age at first calving and lifetime production. Larger calves with faster growth rates are big enough to be served earlier and are therefore younger at first calving,” explains Volac’s Maggie Gould.

“Consequently meeting growth rate targets throughout the rearing period is essential if target age and weight at first calving are to be met. For example to calve at 24 months, a 40kg calf at birth should reach 550kg at calving – that’s an average 0.7kg daily gain throughout her entire rearing period, or 510kg gain in 730 days. The weigh band will enable producers to meet targets and improve overall herd performance.”

The weigh band retails at £10, but the company is offering a weigh band free to the first 50 producers who contact Volac on 0800 919808.

