

Does Creep Feeding Pay?

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Well creep feeding can be an excellent tool for improving the overall weaning weights of your calves. It can be a good management and economic option for improving your bottom line. There are many factors to consider when looking at creep feeding such as calf prices, price of the feed itself, and the labor you can commit to it. Since this is not a one-and-done type of thing it is something that you will have to look at every year. This is because the factors involved, such as market prices, will change from one year to the next. It is important to look at the factors that will matter to you because like many other things that are involved with raising beef cattle it is not a blanket option. What works for one operation will not always work for another. What are the options that you should look at when deciding to start creep feeding? Well here are some things that you can look at to decide if it is right for you.

--Creep feeding is providing a highly digestible supplement that is specifically for beef calves. This can come in the form of a pellet feed or just in a ground-up form. The key thing here is that it is provided in a way that the older cows cannot get to it. This is done by putting it in a feeder with a cage around it that has an opening that is only a couple of feet wide so the smaller calves are the only ones that can get to it. As with any supplement you will want to place the feeder near where the congregate such as a water source or loafing area. As calves reach weaning age their nutritional requirements also will increase with them. They will need to consume more nutritionally rich foods in order to meet their demands for growth. The problem with this is that usually during this time their mother's milking ability and the quality of the forages will go down. In order to fill the nutrition gaps providing a creep feed may be necessary. Don't think that creep feeding only benefits the calf, it can also benefit the mamma cow as well, and with the calf getting their nutrition from the creep there will be less of an energy demand on her. With this lower demand she can utilize the feed she consumes to do things like putting weight back on to prepare for breeding season. Another thing is the more they weigh the more they pay!

Some positives for creep feeding:

1. Chance to add 40-60 lbs. per calf at weaning depending on ration fed and calf genetics
2. Increased dollars per head if done right
3. Leaves more grass for the cows to eat which improves cow condition
4. Reduced weaning stress because the calf already knows how to eat (this can reduce shrink too)

What are the negatives?

1. Might not be economical so put the pencil to it and see, you're the boss
2. It can be difficult to get feed trucks into certain areas

Considerations for Creep Feeding

One of the main things to look at before deciding to do this is the overall condition of your pastures. Creep feeding has been shown to be most beneficial when pasture conditions are poor. In those conditions average feed conversion has been shown to be 4-6:1 or 4 to 6 lbs. of creep feed for 1 pound of gain. If the pasture conditions are excellent then average feed conversion drops to 14-18:1. Another

thing to consider is the time of year that you will be putting this feed out. There have been many studies that have shown a benefit to provide creep feed 60 days prior to weaning. When you do this, it gives the calves time to get use to eating out of a bunk and will make weaning less stressful for them. It will also be a benefit to them if they are put in a feedlot situation after because they will already know how to find feed. In the end you will have to decide if the cost of creep feeding will provide more profit for you. So, the question is will it be more profitable and add to your bottom line? When you are calculating the cost of creep feeding there are some more things to consider than just the cost of the feed. When you are looking at the total costs you will also need to include the depreciation of the equipment that will be used as well as the cost of delivery. Since you do not want to work for free you will need to include the labor costs associated with doing this as well. Now that you have the overall cost of doing this you will need to look at if it will be lower than the expected revenue that you will be getting for those calves. Another thing to consider when look at profit vs cost will be the price slide. This has been shown to be very real and is the difference you will get for creep fed vs non-creep calves. The creep fed calves make sell at a higher price overall but on a \$/lbs. basis they will be lower than the non-creep fed. Well what type of creep or ration is best for me? There are many different options that you can go with. There are two main categories of creep feed, grain (usually corn or oats) and forage (high protein and energy hay) When using any type of forage, we will need to include salt in the mix. But the amount of salt that you will use will depend on if you want to use it as a limiter to decrease the overall consumption or use less salt to increase consumption. Whatever type you go with the rations will contain between 12%-14% crude protein. You will want to look at your specific needs to determine which one will best suit you. If you are financially able or already have the equipment, then mixing your own creep feed may be a more economical option for you. What grains you use in the ration depends on what is grown in your area because shipping adds more expense so my choice was Milo and Oats(grown locally) then I added protein pellets and a good mineral to balance the ration and cracked the milo and oats with my roller mill grinder/mixer. If you go with this option then you will need to include either the price of the mixer, if you buy it new, or the depreciation of it when you are determining the overall profitability of creep feeding. It is worth checking into and as the old saying always goes "the more they way the more they pay". Put the pencil to it, after all, you're the boss!!!