

Chapter 4 – Nutritional Management

Whole-herd Nutrition

Herd nutrition, including your mineral program, has a significant impact on the health and immune response of your calf crop, which can affect carcass-quality potential.

- Work with your nutritionist to develop an effective mineral supplementation program.

Pre-weaning to Weaning

As early as 60 days of age, nutrition other than milk has been shown to affect carcass quality. Supplemental feed while still nursing can have a significant positive effect on marbling. Diets high in starch (especially corn) have been proven a most effective way to stimulate marbling deposition.

- If a calf's growth potential is being held back by nutrition, marbling is being sacrificed. Calf gains below 2 lb. per day should be avoided.

Creep Feeding and Early Weaning

Creep feeding and early weaning can improve marbling and aid transition to independent life at weaning. One of these two strategies, sometimes both, can benefit your operation. The decision depends upon your facilities, management and marketing goals. Retained ownership may improve return on investment. Both strategies bring additional benefits in the face of drought or reduced forage by improving reproductive performance and stocking rates. Both choices are also valid options for calves nursing first-calf heifers or cows with limited milk production.

- Utilize a corn-based, high-starch ration with an ionophore. Because of starch removal in the distilling process, distiller's grains are not recommended as the primary component of a creep diet.

	CREEP FEEDING	EARLY WEANING
Timing	Start at least 80 days pre-weaning	Between 80-150 days of age
Targeted Daily Gains	2.0-2.5 lb./day for S- to M-frame calves 2.5-3.0 lb./day for L-frame calves	
% Protein	Calves < 600 lb. = 16% Calves > 600 lb. = 13.5%	

Weaning

If not early-weaned, match weaning time to the calf's growth potential. The industry standard of 205 days may be late for today's higher growth genetics, as milk without supplementation may not be meeting the calf's energy requirements.

- Consider weaning calves when they have reached approximately 45% of their expected finished weight. Thus, a steer that finishes at 1,300 lb. should be weaned by 585 lb.

Post-weaning and Preconditioning

- 45-day minimum preconditioning period.
- Target gains from 2 to 2.5 lb. per day.
- Get calves eating from a bunk and drinking from a waterer.
- Utilize a corn-based diet. Because of starch removal, distiller's grains are not recommended as the major component of the diet.

Caution

If calves are moved from a high-energy diet to a lower gain (<2.0 lb./day) growing diet, they will not continue to develop marbling at a high rate.