

Heifers for sale post weaning

Meal feeding levels: 1kg increasing to 2kg per day through until sale

➤ Feeding ad-lib meals to the heifer calves, unless they are exceptionally well-muscled, will only result in them laying down fat around the tail head. Live exporters do not want these puppy-fat heifers and therefore you will only rule yourself out of the high-priced market. In general, heifers should be fed 1kg per day for the four weeks prior to weaning, increasing to 2kg per day from weaning through until sale. Where grass supplies are tight post weaning and weather conditions are poor, this could be increased to 3kg per day, but only where heifers are well-muscled. You will need to keep an eye on condition score. If you see heifers starting to become too fat then reduce meal feeding. If planning on stepping up to 3kg per day you should feed a ration similar to that recommended for bulls on ad-lib meals.



Bulls suitable for export

Meal feeding levels: Ad-lib (4-5kg per day) through to sale

➤ When fed meals ad-lib, top quality bulls will continue to develop muscle as opposed to laying down fat. Therefore, not only will you get a heavier weaning weight, but also improved conformation. It is important when going down the ad-lib route that the ration you are feeding is balanced. A typical ration suitable for this system is detailed in Table 1. Depending on weight and age, calves will consume between 4kg and 5kg of meal per day when offered ad-lib and will consume little grass. The live export market is currently paying from €2.20/kg to €3.50/kg for top-quality bull calves. Therefore, you are well rewarded for every additional kilogram of liveweight gain you produce. With these bulls returning 1kg of liveweight gain for every 4-5kg of meal fed, you're investing around €1 to get a return of up €3.50, depending on the quality of the calf.



Bulls for domestic market

Meal feeding levels: R+ bulls fed ad-lib for a period of eight weeks, plainer quality bulls fed 1-2kg per day for duration of weaning period.

➤ Second-grade bulls will still benefit from ad-lib meal feeding. However, the economic return will not be as high, mainly because each additional kilogram of liveweight gain will be of a lower value compared to export-quality calves. Meals should be fed ad-lib to R+ continental bulls for the duration of the weaning period, provided they are going to be sold within four weeks of weaning. Where the calves are going to be retained on the farm for six-to-ten weeks after sale, the introduction of the creep feeder should be delayed until weaning - fed 2kg per day for the four weeks pre-weaning. Feeding ad-lib to plainer quality calves should be avoided. These animals will tend to become too fat and the economics are questionable due to poor conversion rates and the lower price per kilogram. Feed a standard mix at a rate of 1kg for the duration of the weaning period, increasing to 2kg if grass supplies are tight.

Big variation in ration prices across Ireland

A MEAL survey carried out by the *Irish Farmers Journal* shows that there is huge variation in the prices charged for weanling rations, crunches and beef mixes.

The price for simple three or four-way mixes ranged in general from €160 to €190/tonne, rising to €220 to €240/tonne for more specialised rations and, in some cases, to over €300 per tonne for cooked or muesli type crunches. This is a massive difference and one that does not need to be borne in the long term.

Many farmers prefer introducing calf crunch at the beginning to get calves started eating meals.

There is some merit in this as calves will take to the feed quicker due to high sugar levels. However, once calves are eating satisfactory levels of meal, they can be changed

across to cheaper type rations as detailed in Table 1.

While prices remained similar around the country for bagged rations, there was a difference of €20 to €30 per tonne for comparable bulk rations depending on location.

Farmers in the West and South West are, in general, paying €175 to €200 per tonne for simple three or four-way mixed bulk rations while farmers in the East are sourcing these for €155 to €185 per tonne.

It should also be noted that there is a saving to be made from purchasing bulk rations either in large quantities or half tonne bags. Where farmers have ways of handling rations in this form, there is a saving of €30 to €40 per tonne to be made from buying equivalent rations in bagged form.

KEYPOINTS

1) Getting calves onto ad-lib meals

Getting calves onto ad-lib meals is relatively simple when they are still suckling the cow and have an adequate supply of grass. You can simply move in with the creep feeder and the calves will gradually build up intakes. A good tip is to put in the creep feeder at the same time as moving stock into fresh paddocks. The key to avoiding problems is ensuring that the hopper does not run empty and the trough is clean.

2) Getting calves started on meals

Getting calves started on meals can be a problem. Where there is an issue, you should buy a few bags of the weanling crunch to get calves started and then slowly revert back to a standard ration.

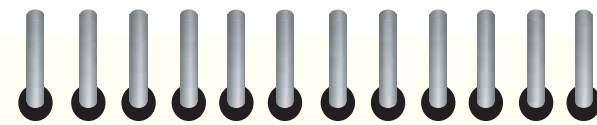
3) Feeding twice per day

When feeding low levels of meal such as 1kg to 2kg per day, there is no need to feed calves twice a day. However, twice per day a feeding is a useful way of checking calves are healthy post weaning.



Where creep grazing calves ahead of the cows is not possible, fencing off a corner of the field with either a creep gate or a raised electric fencing wire will allow for calves to be fed using a trough while at the same time restricting the cows.

With the exception of very well muscled heifers, meal should be fed at a rate of 1kg to 2kg per day



Homework for Week 2

- Establish the target market for your calves post weaning and feed meals accordingly.
- Plan to have a supply of good quality grass in well sheltered paddocks for calves post weaning.
- Make sure you have a suitable method of feeding calves meal without allowing the cows access to the trough.

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