

## **DON'T FORGET YOUR YEARLINGS**

As we enter winter, many herds are in the midst of autumn and winter calving and are looking to dry off their spring calving herd. Calves are demanding a greater proportion of our time and the usual lameness issues mean that we seem to be taking longer and longer to get the cows home every day. Add to this the need to get fertilizer out, then onto joining cows, the day fills up pretty easily. With fewer daylight hours it's a wonder we have time to get any of this done!

Unfortunately, in many cases we can't get everything done and the first thing to go by the wayside is attention to our yearling heifers.

How many times have you got through the day and thought 'the heifers haven't been fed yet'? Or worse still, at the end of the week and they haven't been seen all week?

During this busy period, take some time to think about what is happening with your yearlings. Coming out of their first summer period, rising one year olds are actively laying down bone and muscle tissue. This tissue holds some of the keys to longevity in the herd. Those animals with stronger bones (no matter what the frame) will have greater longevity and experience less lameness after calving than others. They are also going through significant hormone changes- These animals are the teenagers of the cattle world!

Now is the time to be considering the nutrition of these young cattle to ensure that they are at their best for joining and for future longevity. Heifers have a high requirement for protein and minerals in particular, and even when pasture is plentiful, their diet may be lacking compared to their requirements.



According to NRC 2001, which should be considered an absolute minimum, a 250kg (liveweight) heifer growing at 1kg/day requires 6kg DMI at 10ME and 14.4%CP, with a minimum of 40gm Calcium and 18gm Phosphorus. While pasture at this time of year might exceed protein requirements (which can have an effect on fertility at joining), animals often struggle to access sufficient Calcium, Phosphorus. They may also struggle to maintain energy:protein balance, which is adequate energy to utilize the protein present in the diet. 6kg DM of pastures typically provides only 32gm of calcium even when well fertilized, which is only 80% of their basic requirements. This fact highlights the importance of supplementing their diet with additional energy and macro + trace minerals, to ensure your heifers reach their full potential.

**Balance is the key!**

Age (months)	Holstein - Friesians	Jerseys
3	100	80
4	120	95
5	140	110
6	160	125
7	180	140
8	200	155
9	220	170
10	240	185
11	260	200
12	280	215
13	300	230
14	320	245
15	340	260

## **BIG GIRLS XL**

Heifer rearing is one of the most important jobs on any dairy farm, it requires a high level of inputs with no return until the first lactation, two years after the heifer is born.

InCalf Project leader, Dr Barry Zimmermann, is encouraging farmers to take more care with heifer rearing management with InCalf's new awareness campaign, **Big Girls XL**.

This program emphasises the evidence that heavier well-framed heifers;

- Get in calf easier the first time
- Produce more milk in the first lactation
- Get back in calf sooner for the second lactation
- Stay in the herd longer
- Need less assistance calving
- Cope better with herd competition

A successful heifer rearing program involves the farmer having a clear understanding of what the heifer needs and how to reach target joining weights. Heifers need to be assessed regularly and if pasture or fodder is running short, extra feed may be required to reach these targets. It is unfortunate when heifers do not reach their growth targets, as they are the farm's future income, and can be very costly if she is culled early.

Quantifying heifer liveweights and monitoring progress can be done in various ways. Weighing is a relatively easy task if you have scales available. If you don't ask your herd improvement centre, they quite often lend them out. If there are no scales available, use a girth tape or wither height stick.

Heifers should be weighed every 3 months, the heifers that are under target weight should be drafted and fed extra feed, to allow them to catch up to the rest of the mob.

An easy way to work out heifer weight targets at any stage is to use InCalf's rule of thumb:

**Holsteins: age (months) x 20 + 40 = today's weight in kg**

**Jerseys: age (months) x 15 + 35 = today's weight in kg**

**Example:**

**14 month old Holstein Calf.**

= ( 14 x 20 ) + 40 = 320 kg *target weight for this age*

For more information, or to assess your calves, contact your Technical Services Representative.