

Dairy Facts

What does a baby calf eat?

After a calf is born, it is very hungry. Calves lack protection against the outside world's bacteria. To give them a good start, they need to be fed 4 quarts of colostrum (their mother's first milk) within 12 hours after birth! It is high in protein, energy, and protective antibodies. A calf can stand on their own and even walk within one hour after being born. The calf is then moved to a pen of their own so they stay safe and clean.

Over the next three days, a calf will drink 2 to 3 quarts of their mother's milk, 2 times each day. On the fourth day, they can be fed whole milk or milk replacer. Milk replacer is a dried milk that you add water to so it can be fed as a liquid. To make sure that the calf grows big and strong, when they are five days old, they are given free choice of water and a high quality calf starter grain.

The starter grain helps all 4 compartments of the calves stomach develop so they can begin to eat the same things as an adult cow. These 4 compartments allow the calf to digest fiber like grasses, hays, and other roughages. A calf will be fed milk replacer until they can eat 2 pounds of starter grain for at least 3 days in a row. Then, they weaned off the milk to water, grain, and hay.

Calves need to live in a shelter that is dry, clean, and draft free, and has good air quality.

Depending on their breed, a calf will weigh 50 to 100 pounds when they are born. If the calves owners take care of me properly, they will reach a weight of 900 to 1300 pounds by 2 years old (see individual breed signs over the calf pens for more details).