

Vet's Corner: Whole Milk vs. Milk Replacer

Higher milk prices have brought back the smiles on many dairy producers. One downside to the higher prices has been the accompanying cost increase of milk replacer for baby calves. It has been especially tough on the milk fed veal business.

On the Penn State website, <http://www.das.psu.edu/xls/calfmilkcostcompare.xls>, Coleen Jones and Jud Heinrichs share a calculator which compares the cost of milk replacer and whole milk. Inputs for the calculation were \$22/cwt milk price and \$70/bag cost of 20:20 milk replacer, as reported by several herd health clients in July. Feeding rates were 1 gallon whole milk vs. 1.25 lb milk replacer. Without going into too much detail, some interesting outputs follow:

	Whole Milk	Milk Replacer
Crude protein fed per calf (lb/d), DM basis	0.27	0.25
Fat fed per calf (lb/d), DM basis	0.30	0.25
Cost per calf per day (\$/calf/d)	\$1.89	\$1.75

The narrow difference in cost has many producers investigating switching to feeding whole milk because they expect better health and performance in the whole milk fed calves.

Another potential advantage to feeding whole milk could be to receive the full antibody protection from vaccination of the cow with one of the new vaccines for E. Coli/Rota/Corona. Currently, these vaccines are used extensively in the beef industry, where the calf has a constant supply of maternal antibody via suckling whole milk. Many dairy producers have not adopted the vaccines because the calf consumes the maternal antibody for only four days in colostrum and then is switched to milk replacer which cannot be presumed to contain antibody. (In some of our practice's toughest Rota/Corona calf scours outbreaks, our best protection was to add a pint of whole milk to milk replacer for the first two weeks of life in an attempt to supply some Rota/Corona antibody.) Feeding whole milk from a herd protected with E. Coli/Rota/Corona vaccination could be a good step in battling calf scours in baby calves.

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