

# Ten Do's and Don'ts of Raising Heifers

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1. Feed colostrum to a newborn calf within an hour of birth. Calves are born with little antibodies against disease and must get these antibodies from colostrum. The absorption of antibodies, large protein molecules, decreases very rapidly after birth. After 24 hours of age, no antibodies can be absorbed by the calf from the colostrum.
2. Calves should be fed a high-quality calf starter within three days after birth. A newborn calf is a monogastric or simple-stomached animal. Consumption of calf starter helps develop the calf into a ruminant by increasing the size of the rumen in relation to the abomasum or true-stomach. Feed small amounts of calf starter at a time and regularly remove and replace uneaten calf starter.

DO NOT mix a commercial 16-20% crude protein calf starter with cracked shell or ear corn. Doing so decreases the amount of protein, minerals and vitamins the calf will receive.

For example: Mixture of 50% cracked shell corn and 50% of a commercial 16% crude protein commercial calf starter

Shell Corn	= 9% Crude Protein
Calf Starter	= 16% Crude Protein
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50:50 Mixture	= 12.5% Crude Protein
REQUIREMENT	= 16% Crude Protein
(Less than 6 mo age)	

3. Allow 2-3 weeks when making changes in the housing and feeding program of calves after they have been weaned from milk. Often times calves are weaned in the morning, moved to a large group of calves that afternoon, and, at the same time, the grain mix and type of hay fed is changed. These changes should be made gradually over a two week time-period.
4. Group heifers in small groups according to their size and age. Under 8 months of age, limit the group size to 5-7 heifers per group.
5. DO NOT USE PASTURE or silages as the sole source of forages for heifers under 6 months of age. Young heifers cannot consume enough pasture or silage to meet their nutrient needs. Pasture and silages should be limited to 25-33% of the forage dry matter consumed.
6. DO NOT FEED UREA or NPN to heifers under 6 months of age.

7. **BALANCE RATIONS** for heifers to reflect the type and quality of forages available. Proper amounts of protein and energy are necessary for heifers to grow at the proper rate. Protein is used for skeletal growth which helps express her genetics for stature.

	<b>Body Weight (lbs)</b>	<b>Crude protein (%)</b>
3-6 mo	300	16%
7-12 mo	600	15%
13-18 mo	900	14%
19-22 mo	1100	12%

8. Use Bovatec or Rumensin at the appropriate amounts to increase feed efficiency and weight gain and protect against an outbreak of coccidiosis.
9. Heifers should be fed and managed to gain 1.7 lbs/day for Holsteins and other large breeds and 1.3 lbs/day for Jerseys.

For a Holstein Heifer who weights 100 lbs at birth,

- ◀ If she calves at 1324 lbs and
  - Gains 1.7 lbs/day, she will be 24 months old at calving
  - Gains 1.5 lbs/day, she will be 27 months old at calving
  - Gains 1.2 lbs/day, she will be 34 months old at calving
- ◀ If she calves at 1150 lbs at 27 months of age, she gained 1.3 lbs/day  
GOAL = 1.7 lbs/day

10. Heifers are an important enterprise in a dairy operation in addition to the crops and care of the milking herd. Each heifer represents a substantial financial investment. Kentucky farmers estimate that it costs \$800-1200 to raise a heifer from birth to calving. Protect this financial investment by paying close attention to the needs of your heifers. They represent your future in the dairy industry.