

A Very Important Nutrient: **WATER!**

As we are in the midst of summer weather I thought it would be good to give a few notes on the importance of water for calves.

There are 2 keys when it comes to encouraging water consumption:

1. **Quality** – Water should be high quality and kept fresh
2. **Quantity** – Enough water should be offered to promote healthy growth and rumen development

There are 3 important reasons why we provide water to calves.

1. *Rumen Development* – Calves are born without a functioning rumen which is developed by fermentation of grain and water.
2. *Improved Grain Fermentation* – Milk replacer consumed by a calf is directed into the abomasum, which is the calf's largest stomach compartment at this age. Calves will drink water because it will be directed to the rumen and will aid in the fermentation of calf starter.
3. *Better Starter Intake* – Calves offered free choice water consume more calf starter and begin to grow at a faster rate.

When and how much water to offer.

- *By one or two days of age* – young calves may only drink a pint or two, but it's important to have it available.
- *Consumption depends on milk replacer feeding level* – Research by Dr. Jim Quigley found that calves provided two quarts of milk per day would consume about 3 quarts of water per day. Likewise, those being fed just over 3 quarts of milk replacer per day will still drink about 2.5 quarts of water per day.
- *Older calves need more* – By the time calves reach two months of age, they should be drinking 10 to 12 quarts a day.

Calves will drink more in hot weather – Expect water consumption to go up by 33% or more as temperatures reach the high 70's and low 80's and anticipate it may double as temperatures surpass 90 degrees.

Make sure that the water is fresh – Quality is everything.

- *Separate buckets* – Feed buckets should be separated from water buckets to prevent grain from being dribbled into the water and vice versa. Land O' Lakes research shows separation improves both starter and water consumption
- *Routine Cleaning* – It is important to keep the water buckets clean because it will encourage calves to drink more water and therefore eat more starter.

Providing calves with free-choice water from their first few days of age is one of the easiest and cheapest strategies to employ for improved rumen development, average daily gain, and preparation for weaning at a younger age.

I hope this gives everyone some good pointers on the importance of water to calves. If anyone has any questions feel free to give me a call or send an email.

Thanks,
Amy

*This is taken from Land O Lakes Animal Milk Products Co. Calf College Course Notes. The Importance of water to calf growth.

