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Master Breeders

A glimpse into the Fleury, Front View,
Jolibois, Okadale and Rodveil herds

Calf well-being

A tool for early calving



BREEDER PROFILE – MASTER BREEDER

BY
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Fleury Holstein With dreams, daring and dedication... anything is possible



“We are doubly pleased with this honour, because our animals continue to perform well off the farm” This is why Jean-Albert Fleury is so proud to be awarded a second Master Breeder title in as little as 14 years. Indeed, over 35 per cent of the points for the shield were contributed by animals that had been sold.

There's no magic formula for obtaining this award: you just have to believe in it. According to Jean-Claude Fleury, “it all starts with a dream.” From the outset, he set realistic goals for the operation that led him, step by step, to the title of Master Breeder. He says that with this approach, it's more motivating to note the changes and see the results of one's efforts. “You can't hope to be a Master Breeder without having bred an Excellent cow, in the same way as you can't win your Club's production trophy when your average is lower than the winner's 3000 kg. You set targets for 1000 kg increments, and as the years go by you realize you're getting closer, until the day you win the trophy you dreamed of!” What matters, he says, is to be rigorous and consistent, and to believe in yourself.

Winning conditions

For the Fleury family, teamwork was key from the very beginning. It is essential, they say, to take time to choose the right people who can contribute to the farm's success, and this is true in all areas. Their selection criteria are simple: they want to collaborate with honest people who put their heart into their work and pull in the same direction. In short, team players.



The Fleury family, from left, Jean-Albert Fleury, Ginette Boulanger, Jean-Claude Fleury and Mylène Fournier.

Another factor that contributed to their success was being able to count on mentors, who gave them the opportunity to discuss and validate their breeding strategy and to make improvements in genetics, matings, and identifying the best cows for embryo flushes. It was this last approach that had a major impact on the points acquired for the shield, since the elite cow families they used were selected in keeping with their vision for the farm.

Breeding philosophy

Fleury Holstein is based on deep cow families that include numerous generations of VG or EX animals with stars (*) in their pedigrees. In addition to those specifications, Jean-Claude also looks at feed bunk behaviour before developing or buying a cow. He prefers aggressive cows with wide muzzles, traits that are shared by active and, most importantly, productive cows.

A cow purchased in co-ownership after her first calving, *Calbrett Shottle Lisamaree*,

EX-91 24*, is an example of the type of cow these breeders love to work with. Having contributed the majority of the points toward this title, the *Lisamaree* line continues to leave a legacy in the herd, with 6 EX daughters and 19 VG, many of which are currently milking and have outstanding mammary systems and excellent feet and legs.

Another of the herd's mainstays is *Fleury Juror Brenna*, EX-91 9E 9* (MS: 94), a record holder for the prefix in terms of longevity, as can be seen from her classification after many calvings. In 11 lactations, *Brenna* produced over 155 000 kg of milk. Her descendants

are also models in that respect, with one of her daughters, *Fleury Goldwyn Bonnie*, EX-92 6E 2*, now expecting her 10th calf. ■



Calbrett Shottle Lisamaree, EX-91 24*, expresses a perfect combination of conformation, genetic indexes and a deep pedigree, in the style of her dam, *Lylehaven Lila Z*, EX-94.

FLEURY HOLSTEIN

Town : Victoriaville

Herd : 250 head, including 85 lactating cows

Production : 11 456 kg, 4.0% F, 3.4% P

Classification : 19 EX, 61 VG and 29 GP

By
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Ferme Verhaegen inc. The Front View herd, always moving forward



Receiving this Master Breeder title is a true honour for Réal, Lucie, Danny and Jonathan Verhaegen, the owners of Ferme Verhaegen inc. The Front View herd is an example of how much can be achieved when a family pulls together, with all members bringing their specific expertise to the table. And that's why Ferme Verhaegen never stops innovating.

The story began in 1954, when Jean and Élisabeth, Réal's parents, immigrated to Quebec from Belgium, purchasing a small farm with a 20-cow herd, in Saint-Georges-de-Clarenceville. By 1984, when Réal took over ownership from his father, the operation had a 60-kg quota and 125 ha of cropland. A few years later, Lucie Bonneau joined her husband, Réal, as joint owner of the farm. In 1997, they began to register and classify their animals, and enrolled the herd on milk recording.

Over the years, many changes have been implemented on the Verhaegen farm. In 2002, they decided to convert their conventional barn into a loose-housing facility with free stalls. They also opted to install a double -12 milking parlour. The aim of those changes was to increase the size of the herd and make the cows more comfortable, in addition to serving as an incentive for the younger generation. In 2006, Jonathan became a shareholder in the farm and assumed responsibility for the field crops. In 2008, it was Danny's turn to officially join the team of owners, taking charge of herd management.



The Verhaegen family, from left: Jeanne Tremblay, Jonathan Verhaegen, Cynthia Verhaegen, Réal Verhaegen, Jean-Sébastien Labelle, Lucie Bonneau, Christiane Verhaegen, Danny Verhaegen and Cynthia Lord. In front: the children, Anna, Henry, Alexy and Mathys, all Verhaegens.

Photo: Courtesy of the Verhaegen family

While others may see multiple ownership as a potential source of conflict, the Verhaegens view it as a major asset. The four shareholders each do their part in contributing to the farm's progress.

Danny's breeding philosophy rests on selecting sires that are able to transmit good conformation traits. According to the owners, it's an approach that ensures they get good-looking cows. And obviously, if cow comfort and feeding are optimal, milk production will follow suit.

A number of cow families contributed toward this first Master Breeder shield, in particular that of *Oconnors Gibson Chanel*, VG-88 6*. Purchased when she was pregnant in 2006, *Chanel* gave birth to *Oconnors Carpenter Heidie*, VG-88 7*, a productive dairy cow that earned a Superior Lactation certificate and

yielded 67 379 kg of milk in five lactations. *Heidie* also bred well, producing 2 EX daughters and 5 VG, among them *Front View Goldwyn Heidy*, EX-91-3E 3*, a cow that produced 91 056 kg of milk in only five lactations. One of *Heidy's* daughters, *Front View Windhammer Trudy*, has a Superior Lactation certificate and was recently classified EX-93-2E.

In terms of breeding goals, Danny hopes at some point to see one of his cows classified with a score of 94 points. He also wants to continue improving the health, comfort and longevity of the herd. And needless to say, all four owners hope that the next generation will take on the task with as much satisfaction and passion. ■



Front View Windhammer Trudy, EX 93 2E, produced over 55 000 kg of milk in four lactations.

FERME VERHAEGEN, FRONT VIEW HERD

Town : Saint-Georges-de-Clarenceville

Herd : 350 head, including 185 lactating cows

Classification : 26 EX, 145 VG and 45 GP

Production : 13 190 kg of milk, with 4.1% F and 3.4% P



BREEDER PROFILE – MASTER BREEDER

BY
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Ferme Rolandale The Jolibois herd, built on excellence



Setting its sights on excellence, the Dubois family has demonstrated perseverance, patience and determination in its efforts. To date, the Jolibois herd has bred 93 cows classified EX, and the average score for the last few years is close to 89 points, ranking the herd among the best in the country. In 2017, the herd topped the list in Canada for first lactation classification, with an average of 85.43 points. The Dubois family can clearly take pride in having laid the groundwork for a long-lasting herd.

Rolland Dubois acquired the family operation in 1988, when he founded Ferme Rolandale enr. but chose to keep his parents' prefix, Jolibois. Until 2000, he considered himself to be a livestock trader, investing in good cow families. Over the years, he has been able to pass that passion on to his son Marc-André, who took an early interest in breeding, so much so that when he completed his education in 2013, he became a co-owner in the operation.



Photo : François Nadeau

Three generations on Ferme Rolandale. Front, seated: Jacques Dubois and Anita Dion, Rolland's parents. Standing, from left: Francis Lessard and Rosalie Dubois, Rolland Dubois and Christiane Lauzé, and Joëlle Corriveau and Marc-André Dubois.

One of the most influential lines in this herd is that of *Jolibois Nancy Tab*, VG-87 5*. Her pedigree indicates a well-rounded cow, synonymous with longevity and high fat yields. Although this family was not often used for embryo transfers, there are a number of descendants in the herd, including *Jolibois Nancy Sanchez*, EX-94 3E 2*, a cow that produced 74 547 kg of milk in five lactations.

Without question, the cow that made the greatest contribution toward this award is *Lindenoord Rudolph Lilac*, EX-96 3E 16*. With 62 stars among her descendants, this Cow of the Year 2010 has clearly passed down a propensity for good conformation, production,

and longevity. Not only has she left her mark on the Jolibois herd through her daughters, 7 EX and 6 VG, but she has also had a positive influence on many other herds as well. "She's a cow that did it all for us!" acknowledges Mr. Dubois.

But it was *Echo Ridge Skychief Delight*, EX-4E 6*, Reserve Grand Champion at the World Dairy Expo in Madison, in 1999, that brought Ferme Rolandale enr. to the attention of the show circuit, when it became the first Quebec operation to win a rosette at that event. Two of her granddaughters, representing two different branches of descendants, have particularly distinguished themselves. The first, *Jolibois Doris Dundee*, EX-94 4E 7*, has gained recognition for conformation, with 12 daughters classified VG or better, including 5 EX. The second, *Jolibois Delphine Atwood*, EX-93 2E, with 6 VG daughters, is a source of great hope for this line, which is known for its

enviable reproductive traits and milk quality.

More recently, the red and white contingent at Ferme Rolandale enr. has been carving out a place of choice for itself. The breeders initially acquired *Dala-Star RL Feather-Red*, VG-88 14*, to compete in the showing with a daughter of *Advent*, a sire unavailable in Canada. Little did they know that within only a few years a whole line-up of her descendants would lead them to win a number of titles at the RAWF in Toronto, including Best Bred and Owned in both 2016 and

2017, with *Jolibois Flore Contender*, EX-94, in addition to many breeder and exhibitor banners in other Red and White shows. Credited with 10 per cent of the points accumulated for this shield in only five years, the performance of the F line in the Jolibois herd suggests that this R&W family will continue to make an impression. ■



Jolibois Flore Contender, EX-94, crowned Best Bred and Owned in 2016 and 2017 in Toronto.

FERME ROLANDALE ENR.

Town : Saint-Flavien

Herd : 170 head, including 65 lactating cows

Production : 10 500 kg of milk, 4.2% F, 3.4% P

Classification : 39 EX and 39 VG



BREEDER PROFILE – MASTER BREEDER

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Ferme Okadale inc.

Holstein breeding presents exciting challenge



The Okadale operation, in the Oka area (Outaouais-Laurentides), is the continuation of the Dagenais family farm. It is a perfect example of how hard work and a simple passion for breeding can lead to prestigious awards. What's more, this is the second time that the family has earned a Master Breeder shield.

Michel Dagenais and his wife, Andrée Gaudreault, took over the reins of the family farm in 1975. Since then, they have devoted a great deal of time to improving the purebred Holstein herd. To make it the operation it is today, Michel implemented a number of changes, buying purebred animals from other breeders, modernizing the milking system, expanding the barn, enrolling on milk recording and investing in machinery. The results of these improvements were rewarded with a first Master Breeder title in 2004.

Interestingly, becoming a Master Breeder was not specifically a goal for Michel and Andrée. It was simply thanks their daily efforts and their passion for breeding good-looking, productive dairy cows that Ferme Okadale inc. was honoured with this special mark of recognition. And that's in addition to the numerous awards they've won for the exceptional quality of the milk they produce each year.

Michel has been fortunate to have been able to pass his passion for genetics down to son Benoit, who has been in charge of reproductive decisions for the herd since



Three generations of the Dagenais family. Top, from left: Yohan Dagenais, Benoit Dagenais and Michel Dagenais. Front, from left: Ève Dagenais, Alexis Dagenais, Anik Lalande, Livia Dagenais and Andrée Gaudreault.

2004. Benoit and his wife, Anik Lalande, took over the operation in 2016, and with their four children they now represent the family's fourth and fifth generations on the farm. Benoit has clearly followed in his father's footsteps, because once again, Ferme Okadale inc. is the recipient of a Master Breeder shield.

A number of cows contributed points toward this second title. The lion's share of the points came from the family of *Okadale Gilbert Lila*, EX 4E 4*, whose descendants make up no less than 50 per cent of the herd.

In particular, one of *Lila's* pet daughters, *Okadale Sanchez Astrid*, EX91 3E 1*, produced 72 114 kg of milk in five lactations, with 4.2 per cent fat and 3.4 per cent protein. *Astrid* represents the family's ninth

generation of cows classified VG or EX. Benoit especially appreciates her dairy strength and her mammary system.

The Dagenais family has also collected a number of embryos from *Okadale Goldwyn Lydia*, EX 12*, another of *Lila's* daughters. In three lactations, *Lydia* produced 47 691 kg of milk, with 4.9 per cent fat and 3.7 per cent protein. *Lydia* has also produced many outstanding daughters, including 5 EX, 5 VG and 4 GP.

This is the story of a passion for breeding that continues through the generations. The future looks promising, because Benoit and Anik's children, although still young, are already showing a marked interest in the operation. ■



Okadale Gilbert Lila, EX 4E 4*, with a yield of 96 620 kg of milk in eight lactations, is the herd's most influential brood cow.

FERME OKADALE INC.

Town : Oka

Herd : 82 head, including 42 lactating cows

Classification : 6 EX, 16 VG and 20 GP

Production : 13 314 kg of milk, with 4.2% F and 3.2% P



BREEDER PROFILE – MASTER BREEDER

BY
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Ferme Rodveil Family, passion and perseverance



Behind the popularity of the Rodveil prefix lies a great deal of perseverance and hard work. The story of the Rodrigue family proves that work together makes anything possible. This achievement is the realization of Dany's long-held dream, the outcome of many years of effort on the part of his entire family.

Because he carried on with the work begun by his parents, the gratitude felt by Laurette Veilleux and André Rodrigue toward their son Dany, who sadly left us earlier this fall, is palpable.

Although the farm suffered a fire in 1989, the family's passion for Holstein breeding stood the test. All the Rodrigues rolled up their sleeves and set to work building a herd that would do them proud. With that goal in mind, Dany used proven sires for 80 per cent of his matings, choosing bulls with good proofs for conformation, in particular excellent udders and good legs, and, in terms of production, high fat and protein levels. The focus of his breeding philosophy was efficiency.

Vidia Tampo Outside, EX 6E 27*, is a brood cow that contributed significantly to the herd's success, since her descendants make up nearly 80 per cent of the herd. In 2012, she won Holstein Québec's My Favourite Cow contest, and the breeders were no doubt seduced by her lifetime production of over 150 000 kg of milk in 11 lactations, in addition to her 32 daughters all classified GP or better. Her descendants now include 5 EX and 20 VG. Among them, *Rodveil Gerard Trixia*, EX-91 5*, is much appreciated by the family, thanks not only to a yield of 60 000 kg in three lactations, but also to her ability to beget remarkable mammary systems.



The family at the heart of the Rodveil farm, from left: Dany Rodrigue, Léa-Maude Rodrigue, Laurette Veilleux and André Rodrigue.

Guayclair Rudolph Sibine, EX 9*, also contributed greatly to this Master Breeder shield, with 24 per cent of the points. *Sibine* has been able to transmit her functional traits to her daughters, just the way Dany liked them. She is the dam of 2 EX cows and 11 VG, a group that includes *Rodveil Shakira Gibson*, EX-93 4E 10*, a cow that won Grand Champion at the Beauce show, in 2006 and 2009, and produced over 100 000 kg of milk in seven lactations. The Rodrigue family used *Sibine* a great deal for embryo transfers, as she seemed well-suited to the task. She is thus the dam of 26 daughters, with 96 per cent of them classified GP or better.

Rodveil Talent Petunia, EX-92 5E, is another cow much appreciated by the family, in particular for her high production, over 90 000 kg of milk in seven lactations, and her ease of calving over the years.

The long road this family has travelled to finally reach the heights of honour in Holstein breeding is a tremendous source of pride for the Rodrigues. From above, Dany no doubt joins his family in celebrating this achievement and the satisfaction of being from the Rodveil farm.



Vidia Tampo Outside, EX 6E 27*, My Favourite Cow in 2012, contributed significantly toward this Master Breeder title, as her descendants make up 80 per cent of the herd.

RODVEIL HOLSTEIN

Town : Saint-Simon-les-Mines

Herd : 204 head, including 83 lactating cows

Production : 12 973 kg with 4,3 % G and 3,19 % P

Classification : 12 EX, 48 TB et 30 BP



By
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Editor

Translation by
Nicole De Rouin



Calf well-being **A matter of profitability as well**

While calf welfare may seem like the half-baked concern of a few soft-hearted souls, a closer look at the question reveals that calf care has a significant impact on both first calvings and farm profitability. First calvings at 22 months are increasingly common, but we could easily be doing better.

Calf well-being is highly dependent on the quality of calf housing, which involves factors such as temperature, humidity and sanitation. According to Steve Adams, agronomist and Dairy Production Expert on Animal Comfort, Behaviour and Well-Being for Valacta's Research and Development Department, the ambient air temperature in calf housing should be kept between 10 and 25 °C. Within this range, calves are not required to use up their energy reserves to maintain their body temperature.

Newborn calves can draw on their reserves of brown fat for the energy needed to maintain their body temperature, but that store of energy runs out quickly. Maintaining the recommended air temperature ensures that their reserves last longer. Depending on

the facilities, it may be a good idea to use heat lamps or a portable incubator (or a homemade version) to provide adequate heat for newborns.

Heat is particularly important for calves that have experienced a difficult birth, as they tend to have more trouble regulating their body temperature. Supplementary heat is needed when a calf's body temperature, normally at 38.8 °C, drops to 37.8 °C or lower. It is important that newborn calves be dried off as soon as possible, and again, they may benefit from extra heat. A dry hair coat provides insulation and retains heat. A dry calf also absorbs colostrum better.

Be generous with bedding

Ample bedding is another important factor in ensuring that calves are comfortable. Because

of the ratio of body weight to body surface area, more of a calf's body is in contact with the ground when lying down, as compared to an adult cow. Ideally, there should be enough bedding to cover the calf's hooves when lying down. The more the calf is able to settle into the bedding, the more heat the animal retains. Hutches can also be used to house calves, even in winter, but bedding requirements are the same, if not greater.

Heated flooring is not necessarily advantageous for calves. Most of the heat may be absorbed by the bedding, without increasing the air temperature. Likewise, warm bedding may favour the proliferation of insects. On the whole, a lower temperature combined with an ample supply of dry bedding will yield better results. ➔

Ample bedding makes calves more comfortable.





Calf pens allow air to circulate freely at ground level.

Blankets can obviously be useful for calves, but shouldn't replace bedding. Moreover, they should only be used on dry calves, and not for more than two weeks. A dry hair coat and bedding are generally sufficient to keep a calf warm. If a calf's hair coat is damp, the blanket may retain moisture, which defeats its purpose. Blankets can certainly be beneficial for at-risk calves, as well as for calves housed outdoors in winter.

Heat stress

Calves may suffer from heat stress, for example, when housed in poorly ventilated hutches. Ideally, hutches should have windows that can be opened or closed depending on weather conditions. In summer, it is often helpful to raise hutches to improve air circulation. Hutches should also be placed in the shade.

Steve Adams explains that even unborn calves may be affected by heat stress experienced by their dams during pregnancy. Such calves may be less resistant to heat and produce less milk in first lactation, regardless of their genetic potential.

Air quality

A calf's lungs and respiratory tract are sensitive to poor air quality, and breeders have long been concerned about drafts. On the other hand, says Steve Adams, calves mustn't be completely enclosed. To ensure adequate air circulation in and around the

pens, there should be an alleyway both in front of and behind the pens, and the ends of the pens should be slatted. Pens should never be placed along a barn wall.

It is also important to remember that the microclimate in the pens may differ from the overall conditions in the barn, so ventilation decisions should be based on the air temperature near the floor, where calves spend 80 to 90 per cent of their time lying down. In summer, adequate ventilation should be enough to avoid problems, but, in winter, even if the area is clean, air quality can easily become deficient. Lower-level air outlets help solve this problem. Air quality is also affected by animal density, and a minimum of 600 cu. ft. per calf is recommended. Ventilation cannot compensate for overstocking, especially in winter. Ideally, air circulation should be sufficient to change the air at a rate of four times per hour. Reducing calf density also lowers microbial and humidity levels, which is beneficial for calf health. Moisture control is also important, since damp hair loses its insulating properties.

Ammonia levels must also be controlled. Although guidelines point to fewer than 25 parts per million, Steve Adams emphasizes that the recommendation for swine, below 5 ppm, is preferable. A measuring device is not really required: a strong odour that stings the eyes and throat is a sure sign that there is too much ammonia in the air and that ventilation needs to be improved. ➔

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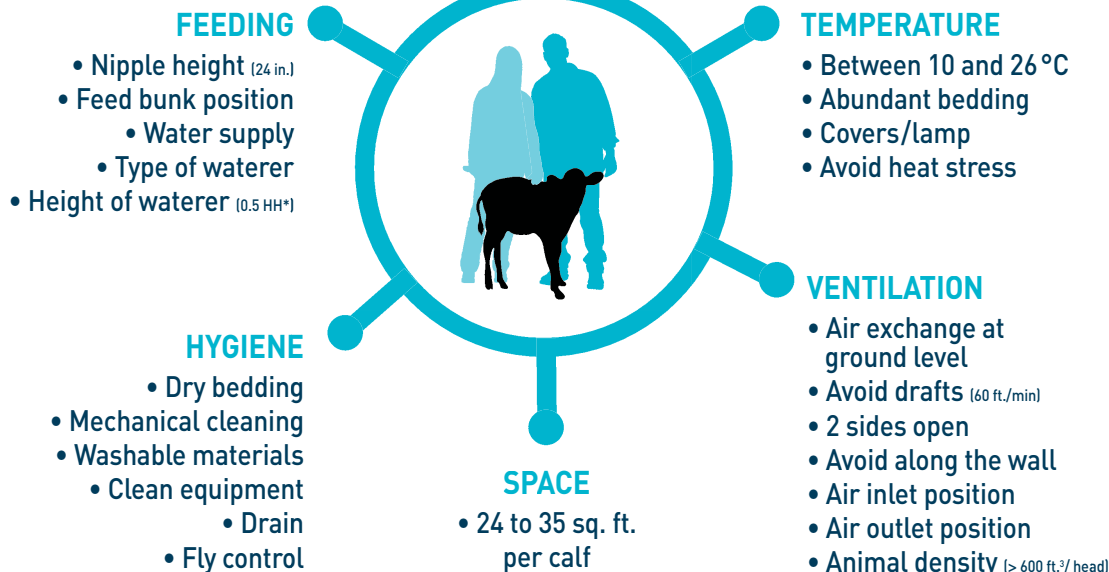
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CALF HOUSING



Immaculate conditions

Space allowance also affects a calf's well-being, and each calf needs an area of 24 to 35 sq. ft. If space is restricted, calves will probably be lying in their manure, and it will be much more difficult to keep the bedding clean.

Using washable materials also facilitates cleaning and sanitation. Pens should be washed, disinfected and then left to dry. Organizing housing so as to provide 30 to 40 per cent more space than is required for the average number of calvings per month will ensure that a clean area is always available for a newborn calf. These same sanitation measures also apply to hutches between calves, and hutches can be relocated at the same time.

Insect control is the last of the sanitation measures that need to be implemented. Steve Adams mentions that recent studies have shown that calf udders are vulnerable to fly bites, which may explain why some first-calf heifers are calving with *Staphylococcus aureus mastitis*. He stresses that it has been



ProAction maintains that calves need contact with other calves to learn to intermingle and suggests that they be housed in pairs as soon as possible. A transition from pairs to groups of four and then eight is ideal.

noted that the more flies there are in the environment, the greater the number of first-calf heifers infected with the disease. Moreover, because insects lay their eggs in bedding, calves are especially likely to suffer from their presence. Temperature control is a very useful tool for reducing insect populations, since lower temperatures slow

the fly reproduction cycle. In summer, bedding should be replaced more frequently, and it may be advantageous to use peat moss or a mix of peat and softwood sawdust instead of straw. While straw adds warmth in winter, it may contribute to the proliferation of insects in the summer months. ➔



Feeding

While the benefits of feeding colostrum have long been established, other practices can affect calf well-being and growth as well. To begin with, nipple feeding is preferable to bucket feeding. Not only is digestion improved, but drinking from a bucket in a few seconds doesn't give calves the time to satisfy their sucking needs, and they tend to suck at everything around them. Ideally, the nipple should be placed at shoulder height, at about 24 inches.

Water is another essential element, and it cannot be completely replaced by milk, especially in summer. Steve Adams recommends that calves be offered water three times a day, as of the third day of life, even if the animals don't seem to want it. Even in winter, calves must have access to water. If they are housed outside, water should be provided twice a day. Buckets and water bowls should be placed at a level halfway to the hip.

Initially, water may be provided in a bucket, but calves should be transitioned to a water bowl prior to weaning. This gives calves time to become familiar with the watering system before going through the stress of weaning. The transition is important, because a heifer that is not drinking enough will necessarily be eating less. ■

◀ During the summer, hutches should be raised to increase air circulation.



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