

MANAGING THE FRESHLY CALVED COW



The freshly calved cow is the most important animal on the farm. If you have stuffed up your winter and/or transition management this is the last chance to get things right. The goal of management for these cows is to achieve peak intakes in as short a time as possible. Historically farmers have been told that it takes 6-8 weeks to get a cow to peak intakes. High performing herds have shown that it can take 10 days. Higher drymatter (DM) intakes mean less condition loss, no metabolic disease or health problems, higher milk yields and improved reproductive performance. The keys to fresh cow management are:

Remove the calf from the cow as soon as possible. This minimises the bond that forms and allows the cow to focus on eating, instead of protecting her calf. If a calf is on the ground it can be taken to the shed. Removing calves before they feed reduces the risk of mastitis and calf scours developing. One bonus is hungry calves are easy to teach how to feed. Ensure all calves get 2L of first milk colostrum at the shed.

- Get the cow onto fresh pasture as soon as possible after calving.
- At the first milking ensure you milk the cow out thoroughly. Give all cows a starter/energy drench, and inject with B12 to stimulate their appetite.
- Feed colostrum cows ad-lib. Don't break feed – they need to be encouraged to eat. Take supplement feeds to them. If you have an in-shed feeding system then take a trough of the mix to their paddock.
- Dust the pasture or supplement with 200-300 grams of limeflour/cow/day.
- Keep cows in the colostrum mob until they are eating properly (their gut should look like it did pre-calving).
- Move cows from the colostrum mob into the milkers in groups (10 or more). This reduces the stress of mixing on the cows as they need to have "mates", especially heifers.