

Once-a-day feeding system compares well with computerised feeder



James Gabbey, John Thompson and Sons; Jason Rankin and Chris Catherwood

Last year Northern Irish farmers Chris Catherwood and Jason Rankin won the All Ireland calf rearer of the year award and received a computerised machine as a prize. For the last two years the calves on the Cannon farm had been reared using teated feeders and were fed a skim and buttermilk based milk replacer once a

day (OAD). As they are block calve with 180 cows calving in 10-12 weeks they decided to use both systems to rear the calves and to compare performances and costs on each system. To compare each system they weighed calves at 5 days of age and split them between the two systems.

After initial teething problems the calves on the computerised feeder settled down and calf rearing on both systems ran smoothly. Chris admitted he did find the machine stressful on himself as he took time to adjust to it especially once he had 45 calves on the machine at one time. Over the spring 2/3 of the calves were reared on the OAD system and the others on the computerised feeder.

Table 1 Calf performance	KGs	KGs	KGs
Group	Birth wt	Weaning wt	Wt gain/day
OAD	40.1	74.5	0.71
Computerised feeder	41.1	69.4	0.63

Chris felt the feeder worked well after he got used to it and he could forget about the calves though this could be a double edged sword and the workload could go the other way if he let problems fester. Overall he felt the labour input was less with the feeder.

Calf performance on the OAD system (table 1) was better but this could be down to the familiarity and simplicity with this system compared to the computerised feeder. He also stated that the OAD calves ate dry feed sooner and seemed more content. They were also weaned earlier. The major difference was in the cost of rearing on the two systems (table 2).

Table 2 Cost of rearing		KGs	£ cost/kg	£ cost
Milk	Computerised feeder	47	2	94
	OAD	21	2	42
Estimated Meal intake	Computerised feeder	40	0.3	12
	OAD	48	0.3	14.4
Total	Computerised feeder		106	
	OAD			56.4
	Difference			49.6

While Chris and the rest of the team are busy in the spring when calving, the dilemma with the computerised feeder is the cost of using it. To rear 60 heifers a year the extra cost in powder alone would amount to almost £3000 for 3-4 months work.

Joe Murphy of Bonanza Calf Nutrition stated that the Once-a-day system is very flexible and costs nothing to implement. Calves can be kept in small groups of a similar age ensuring disease levels are kept low and there is limited sharing of teats or buckets another prime source of infection.

For more information on feeding calves Once-a-day freephone Bonanza Calf Nutrition on 0808 1781017. You can also contact Stuart Fry on 07917 210 737 or Joe Murphy on 07500 944 581.