

News Column  
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## WEANING PROTOCOL

My friends give me a hard time about eating at Taco Bell every day. Some apparently don't like the menu, which I think is just fine. Others wonder how I can stand to eat the same thing day after day.

To address the second concern first, I tend to believe that consuming a consistent diet is a good thing. I've fed enough cattle and sheep to know that switching diets can mess with their digestion, throw them off feed, or even kill them if they get too much grain too quickly. So, why wouldn't a consistent diet be good for me too?

But, why Taco Bell? It's pretty simple,.....\$2.94, tax included. If I'm looking old, or they've seen me too many days in a row, they'll give me the senior discount and the bill is just \$2.64. For that price I get all I need, but not so much that I overeat. It's a great deal!

Feeding cattle isn't a whole lot different from feeding this old human. Price is often a factor, but consistency is important too. If I'm feeding a set of newly weaned calves, then consistency becomes a really high priority.

At weaning time, the first thing I'm concerned about is getting calves to eat. Calves are used to momma's milk and grass, so it makes sense to provide grass hay to newly weaned calves since we are taking the milk away from them. We need to offer at least one of the things they are used to eating.

Grass hay isn't going to be highly nutritious, so it needs to be supplemented with some

sort of nutrient dense weaning ration. The problem is in getting the calves to eat the weaning ration. It might take a while for them to learn to like it. Yet, we need for them to eat well in order to stay healthy.

One plan for getting calves used to a weaning ration is to feed a small amount of the ration to both cows and calves prior to weaning. While that is a good plan, it doesn't happen often. Instead, calves are usually pulled off their mothers and the first time they see the weaning ration is the day they are weaned.

To get calves started on their new feeding regimen, it is recommended to place that nutrient dense weaning ration in the bottom of the bunk and top it with high quality grass hay, a feed the calves are used to eating

At the Hays Research Station, they start calves on 0.5% of body weight of each feed, high quality grass hay and a weaning ration. For the first three days, the hay is placed on top of the weaning ration, then on day four they are flipped, putting the hay on the bottom and the weaning ration on top.

Because they are trying to work the calves up to a higher percent of weaning ration, the amount of hay remains constant while the amount of weaning ration is increased daily. In 10-14 days, calves should be consuming 2.2% to 2.5% of body weight.

The weaning management protocol at Hays looks like this:

| <u>Day</u> | <u>Weaning Diet</u> | <u>Grass Hay</u> | <u>Feed Order</u>      |
|------------|---------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| 1          | 0.5% body weight    | 0.5% body weight | Diet bottom/Hay on top |
| 2          | 0.7% body weight    | 0.5% body weight | Diet bottom/Hay on top |
| 3          | 0.9% body weight    | 0.5% body weight | Diet bottom/Hay on top |
| 4          | 1.1% body weight    | 0.5% body weight | Hay bottom/Diet on top |

|   |  |                  |                        |
|---|--|------------------|------------------------|
| 5 | 1.3% body weight                                 | 0.5% body weight | Hay bottom/Diet on top |
| 6 | 1.5% body weight                                 | 0.5% body weight | Hay bottom/Diet on top |
| 7 | 1.8% body weight                                 | 0.5% body weight | Hay bottom/Diet on top |
| 8 | Increase diet by .25 to .50 lb. per calf per day |                  |                        |

The above protocol calls for removing any uneaten feed from the previous day before providing the current day's ration. By day 10 to 14 calves should be worked up to the full amount you expect them to eat.

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to [gmcclure@ksu.edu](mailto:gmcclure@ksu.edu).

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