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Calf rearing: ‘Find a concept that fits the farm!’

The calf is the cow of tomorrow and as such the future of the farm. Today’s calf rearing lays the foundation for the cows that we will be milking in two years. So, if we want to milk better cows in the future, then we need to start preparing them now.

JACQUES BERNARD CHRISTINE MASSFELLER

One parameter the mirrors the profitability of a farm is the average production per day of life, and this is closely associated with calf rearing. Key factors in achieving a high average production per day of life are age at first calving, production capability and longevity. The foundation for these is optimal calf rearing with clear goals: vigorous calves and fast-growing calves! We will present two feeding concepts up to six months of age and want to emphasize that there is not one right concept. It is more so about finding the ideal concept for each individual farm and carrying out with diligence and passion; there are many roads that lead to Rome. We also want to give you insight into a management system that can help farms in various ways.

RIGHT COMBINATION

The company Hofmann Nutrition AG of Switzerland has compiled their experiences since 1978 and developed their own calf rearing concept: the Hokovit Super Heifer Method. Jürg Hofmann and his son Alexander are the owners of the company and the driving forces at Hokovit and they explain that the business has been concentrating on the use of micronutrients in feeding. The term “micronutrients” includes, for example, yeast and plant extracts, herbs and specific fatty acids. It primarily comes down to the right combination, as Jürg Hofmann explains: ‘The composition and further development of our combinations of natural micronutrients has cost us a lot of blood, sweat and tears over the years to ensure that they are visibly and measurably effective and increase the efficiency, health and production of animals. The manufacturing of the formulas is comparable to an orchestra: one violin alone does not make the music. The right combination with many other instruments makes the concert successful.’ Today, the company exports its micronutrient preparations to over 20 countries around the world and implements them specifically according to the needs of their clients.

IMPORTANT CORNERSTONES

The basis for the Hokovit Super Heifer Method from the company’s own brand meat program for Qualivo beef, in which the animals are fed hay, concentrate feed and micronutrients to achieve optimal meat quality. The health and average daily gain of the calves were so impressive that the concept was optimized and tailored to dairy breeds. The cornerstone for successful calf rearing is always the feeding of colostrum, which should happen as quickly as possible. ‘Many high producing cows do not have the desired colostrum quality, so our system aims to supplement the colostrum with our Calvicol. We also recommend Hokostar, a vitamin preparation, which divides the vitamins into very small fat droplets to be effective as fast as possible. Immunity and vigor are the most important things in the first phase of life!’ explains Jürg Hofmann. This is followed by a milk feeding program that lasts for nine weeks and targets a maximal rate of six litres per calf per day, so that each calf requires about 30kg of milk replacer. For solid feed the calves are offered a concentrate feed, which is manufactured according to a Hokovit recipe and contains the micronutrient complex Calvistart. This aims to optimize the microbiome in the gut and improve growth rate, feed efficiency and health. The concentrate feed and hay must be free choice up to six months of age. One option could be to mix the components with molasses in a dry TMR. In total, this requires about 480kg of concentrate and 200kg hay through the first six months of life. Despite limited milk feeding, an average live weight of 230kg is achieved by this age.

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