

## **CREEP FEEDING:**

# **A STRATEGIC PRACTICE TO AVOID HUNGER GAPS**

Every cow/calf producer aims to get a healthy calf crop – born easily and in a concise period of time – that will nurse and graze through the pasture season and reach a heavy, uniform body weight at weaning time. No simple strategy – no matter how good the management!

Creep feeding is one management tool that can help calves grow more muscle and bone (not fat), contributing to higher weaning weights. Producers who want to give their calves this extra boost simply provide extra feed that helps calves grow. Older calves or cows don't need the extra nutrition, so keep them from eating the creep feeding ration by using special feed units or buildings that only the young calves can access.

Creep feeding has been proven effective in protecting and increasing weaning weights in calves born to younger mothers, very old mothers, or when pasture conditions become poor and variable, as is common later in the summer. Male calves and crossbred animals respond best to creep feeding. For very early calving herds, or in years when optimal pasture nutritional levels are delayed, early creep feeding should also be considered.

## **BRIDGING THE “HUNGER GAP”**

In the summer, when calves reach the age of two to three months, their nutritional requirements are approaching the first peak of their lifetime. At the same time, their mothers' milk production begins to gradually decline. Furthermore, the nutritional stress on the mother will be even stronger as she conceives (hopefully) her next calf – which she will gestate into the subsequent calving season. This is the scenario that creates a “hunger gap”.

Instinctively, to compensate for the decline in mother's milk, calves will try to meet their growing nutritional needs by eating more forage. Though climate and annual growing conditions cause great variation, pasture quality and forage availability are often on a downward quality curve at this time. As growing calves try to find more forage to eat, their mothers' forage availability and quality are also declining. Now, calves and their pregnant, nursing mothers are competing for the same feed.

Sound creep feeding can provide some relief to this competition and help achieve optimal growth potential.

## **ADVANTAGES OF CREEP FEEDING**

As with most other cattle management practices, creep feeding is most effective when correctly maintained. Under proper conditions, creep feeding can:

- Provide optimal growth nutrition for improved development of muscles and skeleton, without adding fat
- Increase weaning weights
- Help capture genetic growth potential

- Improve resource utilization of forage and range land
- Improve lifetime performance – even post-weaning

## **WHAT TO FEED?**

Though the precise and optimal ration balance may vary based on such influences as age and breed of the mother, pasture conditions and weather, Land O'Lakes Feed offers options aptly suited for almost all producers' situations. Several different creep feeding formulations are offered, depending on the age of the calf and the various pasture conditions. Your Land O'Lakes Feed dealer can help identify the optimal feed formula for you, such as **Land O'Lakes Creep Pasture Gest** line of products.

## **IT'S ALL ABOUT LOCATION**

Location and accessibility are key factors to the success of any creep feeding program. Creep feeding facilities should be positioned in one or more places, depending on the typical, daily migration of the cow-calf herd. Feeding units should be placed near where cattle typically congregate for more than a few passing minutes during the day. This may be a watering location, hay bunk area, or even a shaded pasture area. These locations will allow more time for calves to comfortably consume the feed, without being rushed to keep up with the movement of their mothers.