

PROPERLY USING CREEP FEED TO INCREASE PROFITS

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Every year, beef producers have the same question for us – “will creep feeding pay for itself?” Many producers have had the experience where the creep feed bill seems to be too high and they feel they have lost value on their calves due to excess flesh. If used improperly, creep feed can result in these problems, but used properly creep feeding can add significant revenue to the cow/calf operation.

Next to calving percentage, weaning weight has the greatest economic impact in a cow-calf operation. As genetics have changed, the impact of creep feeding has improved dramatically (see Table 1). Calves today not only have the genetic ability to gain more on creep feed, but they can also convert creep feed more efficiently which lowers the cost of gain on these calves.

Table 1. Contrast of Cattle Genetics and Creep Feed Performance of 30 Years Ago vs. Today

	30 Yrs Ago	Today
Weaning wt	350 – 400	550 – 650
Extra Gain	25 – 30	75 – 100
Lb creep/lb extra gain	10 – 12	4 – 7
Slaughter wt	850 – 900	1250 – 1300

Montana Nutrition Conferences (1971 & 1974) vs. creep trials reported in 1990's. Summarized by Dr. Cliff Willms

People often wonder if they can safely creep feed heifers that they will be using for replacements. There may have been some validity to this in the past with older genetics, however, recent research has actually shown an improvement in cycling rate and weaning weights off of dams that had creep feed as calves.

What if calves are implanted? Will we still see a response from creep feed? Research done at the University of Florida show that calves did have increased gain from creep with even when implanted.

Some people have been concerned that calves that get creep feed will not perform as well in the feedlot, but research done at the University of Illinois shows no difference in feedlot performance between calves that got creep feed and the calves that did not.

One of the things that has also improved creep feeding performance in the last decade has been the use of complete pelleted high fiber creep feeds such as the Land O'Lakes Creep Pasture

Gest. These high fiber creep generally allow for more growth with less fat deposition, reduced risk of digestive upsets, and better feed conversions as a result of better digestibility.

Following are some bullet points on the benefits of creep feeding and how to manage creep feed for the maximum return:

Benefits of Creep Feeding:

- Heavier calves at weaning, will improve the total dollars received per calf. With this year's calf and feed prices, creep feeding can return an added \$30-40 per calf after the cost of the creep feed.
- With today's genetics, replacement heifers will benefit from a high fiber creep with a better breeding weight and better weaning weights on their calves.
- Creep feeding helps bunk-break calves, so they start on feed easier.
- Creep feeding reduces stress at weaning, which improves their health status.
- Some research has shown improved marbling on the finished cattle when they have had creep feed.
- Calves that are heavier at an earlier date will have a higher market value as feeders, and will have a greater chance of being sold as finished cattle into the better spring markets.

Creep Feeder Placement:

- Do not keep the empty creep feeder out on pasture before you use it, curious calves will discover it is empty and then not bother to come to it when you fill it.
- Place the creep feeder with feed in it about 2-3 weeks before you really need it, this gives all the calves time to find it and learn how to use it. This will often be in June or July.
- For the first few weeks, use a sweet feed such as Future Cow Starter or Calf Manna to entice calves into the creep feeder.
- Ensure that the creep panels are tall enough for the calves to get through without rubbing their back, and be sure the creep area is big enough for them to move around in.
- Place the creep feeder so that it is easily accessible for filling.

- Place the creep feeder on higher ground to reduce mud, but not too far away from the water source.
- Later in the season, you can move the creep feeder away from the water to control feed intake.

Creep Feeding Management Recommendations:

- Make sure it is a supplement and not a replacement for pasture. This will control your costs.
- Do not let the creep feeder sit empty for more than a day or two, the calves will lose interest or the calves could over consume when the feeder is refilled.
- Corn based creep feeds contain starch, which can reduce rumen efficiency and increase fat cover on the calves. High fiber creep feeds such as the complete Creep Pasture Gest feeds from Land O'Lakes will allow calves to grow heavier with less fat deposition. The low starch levels will also improve fiber digestion in the rumen, which improves the feed conversions and lowers the cost of gain.
- If it is possible, limit feeding a higher protein creep will give the best feed to gain ratio and the lowest cost of gain.