

Queen of Calves

The Queen of Calves programme has undergone some major developments in recent times. The product has been on the market for a number of years, but recently research has been published which lends weight to its efficacy.

The Queen of Calves programme involves feeding X-Factor from day 2 to day 18 of the calf's life. X-Factor is primarily a probiotic to enhance gut flora and immune function. After this, the programme moves to feeding Queen of Calves from day 19 for 6 weeks. Queen of Calves contains some probiotic and prebiotic.

The bulk of the ingredients are carbohydrates (marine & plant). Its primary function is as a digestive enhancer. Importantly, these products are NOT milk replacers, rather an adjunct to good feeding and management practices for your calves.

The new trial work looked at the development of animals fed on the Queen of Calves programme. The effect of feeding Queen of Calves together with 4 litres of whole milk was examined.

At weaning, calves fed on the Queen of Calves programme (including X-Factor) had greater mean bodyweight gain, a lower number of days to target bodyweight, and a greater mean hip width gain compared with calves in the milk only group (although mean gain in hip height did not differ among groups). Total calf starter meal intake during the milk period was lower for the Queen of Calves group compared with those offered whole milk only, mainly due to a shorter milk feeding period required.

First lactation total milk fat and protein yields were greater for animals reared on the Queen of Calves programme compared with milk only. Overall, increasing nutrient intake, during the milk feeding period, improved the body weight gain of calves and milk production of dairy heifers during their first lactation. The milk production increases found may be as a direct consequence of enhanced dietary inputs & balance during the first 12 weeks of life. There are plans to study the effects on lactogenic (milk producing) tissue further.

Bell-Booth Ltd, the manufacture of Queen of Calves, has also completed another unpublished study which shows promising data looking at 'curd retention' time in

the calf's stomach. It is thought that the Queen of Calves programme may slow the movement of nutrients through the gut, allowing more to be absorbed which would then in turn promote growth. More work is currently needed in this area.

The long and short of this new work, is that we can now recommend the product on its evidence based research. Importantly, all calves assigned to 'treatment' groups in the study were not compromised weight wise. Since, 73% of 22 month olds heifers returning from grazing in New Zealand were more than 5% behind liveweight BV (genetic) targets (LIC data 2012), the choice to use this product should be made judiciously where all other management is 'up to scratch' and calves are already achieving liveweight targets for every stage of growth. Ask your vet whether the Queen of Calves programme is right for your system.

