



Cattle Producer's Handbook

Nutrition Section

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Creep Feeding Beef Calves

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Creep feeding is the practice of supplementing feed to preweaned calves to increase production. Preweaning weight gains and weaning weights can be increased through creep feeding. However, the selling price of the calves and the cost of feed must be considered when a producer is making a decision about creep feeding. Creep feeding has many advantages, but there are also disadvantages that must be considered by the livestock producer.

When Is Creep Feeding Most Likely to Be Cost Effective?

- **In purebred herds where you want heavy weaning weight and extra bloom on calves.**
- **When calves are born in the fall or early winter:** Creep feeding usually will increase the weaning weight of calves born in fall more than those born in the spring, even if fall-calving cows are fed well throughout the winter.
- **When lactating cows are grazing poor pasture:** Pasture forage often is scant and of low quality during July and August unless legumes, warm-season grasses, or sudangrass hybrids are available. These are the months when creep feeding is most beneficial on many cattle operations.
- **In drought years:** Creep feeding increases weaning weights most in drought years when forage production and quality are below normal.
- **When there are many first-calf heifers or cows over 11 years of age in a herd:** These cows typically produce less milk and subsequently wean lighter calves.
- **In herds that have inherently poor milkers:** Creep feeding is more likely to be profitable for steer calves than for heifer calves if they will be sold as weanling feeders, since steer calves sell for more per pound as feeders. In University of Missouri trials, creep feeding increased the weaning weight of bull calves more than heifer calves born in the fall.

- **When the price discount is small for heavier-weight feeder calves:** This at times happens when feeder calf prices are low and grain prices are high.
- **When grain prices are low in relation to feeder calf prices.**
- **When large-frame calves are to be put on a high-energy feed at weaning and finished for slaughter:** Creep feeding for 90 days before weaning tends to decrease the time and weight at which these calves will grade choice.

When Is Creep Feeding Not Likely to Be Cost Effective?

- **When calves are to be pastured or wintered on roughage after weaning to gain before they are finished for slaughter:** The heavier weaning weight of the creep-fed calves is largely offset in this period because of faster gains by the lighter-weight, non-creep-fed calves. In a University of Missouri study, calves born in the fall and creep fed in winter lost half their extra weight gain advantage from creep feeding after they were pastured the following summer without creep feed.
- **If grain feeding will continue for more than 90 days after weaning:** The fatter creep-fed calves make slower and less efficient gains in the feedlot. This may not apply to large-frame calves whose extra gain from creep feeding is mostly lean growth.
- **If pasture is excellent for the cow herd throughout the summer and when creep-fed calves born in late winter or early spring are to be sold for feeders:** When pastures are sufficient, creep feeding yields less increase in weaning weight, and each pound of gain requires more feed. The selling price per pound for heavier creep-fed calves will likely need to be as high as the price for the lighter-weight, non-creep-fed calves to make creep feeding cost effective when pastures are good.