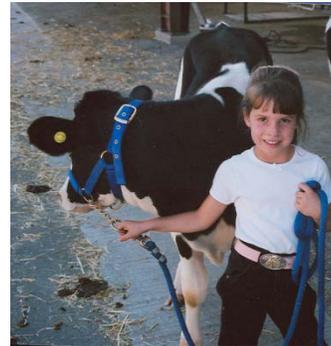




RAISING A BUCKET CALF

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Background

The 4-H Bucket Calf Project is designed for youth up through the summer of their 8th grade year. The bucket calf is a smaller, less intimidating, and less expensive animal that will help youth develop skills and interest in livestock. This is also designed as a short term project beginning with a newborn calf in February or March and ending at the county fair in August.

Where to find a calf

The best place to buy a Holstein bull calf is at a dairy in your area. Find out which dairies are willing to sell them. Call ahead and ask them to let you know when they have a calf for sale. Try to pick up a calf that is at least three days old. This helps ensure that the calf is properly started. Some dairies will sell their calves at auctions but it is harder to get a good healthy animal after it has been stressed by the commotion, frequent handling and disease exposure at the auction yard.

Housing

Calf housing should be clean, dry, and out of the wind but with good ventilation. A well maintained straw bed will reduce stress and lower maintenance requirements. If you are unwilling to lie down in the calf's bed, then you can expect that the calf is also hesitant.

Feeding

The bucket calf may be fed from a bucket or bottle, but not from a nurse cow. Feeding from a bucket is quick and easy once the calf is trained to drink. Train the calf to drink by having it suck on your two middle fingers and lowering your hand into the milk. The space between your fingers acts like a straw drawing in milk. Slowly remove fingers while the calf drinks. If it stops drinking

repeat the process until it drinks on its own. Feeding from a bottle takes longer, but comes instinctively and the extra saliva produced when sucking helps the calf's digestive system and reduces the chance of scours. Thoroughly clean the bucket or bottle and nipple used for feeding the calf.

Milk replacers can be purchased at feed stores. Milk replacers should be high in milk by-products and low in plant products. They should be at least 20% protein, not less than 12% fat or less than 1% fiber. Mix and feed the replacer according to the instructions on the bag. Usually this will be 10% of the calf's body weight in milk, morning and night. A good economical standard is a 20/20 replacer, 20% protein/20% fat, made from all milk products. Using a 28/15 replacer will give good results and reduce the risk of scours. It produces a high growth rate and leaves the calf hungry so he will start on grain and hay earlier. As a point of reference, whole milk is 26/30. If the calf is already on a milk replacer an effort should be made to purchase the same kind as the dairy uses. The milk replacer can then gradually be changed over to the product you desire. Milk replacer mixes best if the milk powder is added to hot water. However it needs to cool to body temperature before feeding.

Offer the calf an 18% protein "calf starter" feed almost immediately. Start with a small amount and increase with the calf's appetite. The calf will consume more if it is fed fresh every day. The old feed can be given to other livestock. Calves can be weaned from milk replacer when they are consuming 2 to 2½ pounds of calf starter daily; usually between four and six weeks of age. Starter grain is typically cheaper than milk replacer, so efforts to start the calf on grain will be worthwhile. Methods

include dropping a handful of starter in the milk bucket or by hand feeding as soon as the milk is gone and the calf is trying to lick you. Feed up to five pounds of starter feed and all the hay the calf wants until about three months of age. At this time switch to a grower feed at five pounds per day and free choice high quality hay and/or quality pasture until fair time.

Clean, fresh water should be available at all times.

Management

Horns should be removed when the calf is two to eight weeks of age while horn buds are small. They can be removed later but it is more difficult. A common method is to clip the hair around the horn and apply an electric dehorner until there is a copper colored ring of skin around the horn.

Castration, or the removal of the testes, is necessary to insure a quality meat product. It should take place between two and ten weeks of age. This can be performed surgically, with an elastrator or with a burdizzo.

Health

Careful observation of calves twice daily is very important. Look at the ears, nose and tongue. The ears should be up and alert, the nose should be shiny wet and bright colored; and the tongue a bright pink or black, not a dull grey color.

A common ailment of calves is scours. Scours are liquid feces as opposed to loose feces. An indicator is a wet tail and a hollow tucked up abdomen. If the calf is bright and alert, continue feeding milk and add a feeding of electrolyte. If the calf is weak and depressed give only electrolytes at 10% of body weight the first day. The following day give the calf 5% of body weight in milk in addition to the electrolyte, and then gradually increase milk over the next 2-3 days back to normal. Scours can be caused by both bacteria and viruses so talk to your vet about the use of antibiotics.

Pneumonia can also be a problem, but is generally caused by poor environment or nutrition. If housing and

feeding are done properly pneumonia is unlikely. Remember, healthy animals are less likely to get sick.

A condition known as acidosis can occur if too much grain and too little roughage is fed to the calf. Remember to make all changes in diet slowly and follow the feeding recommendations above.

When injections are required, remember to give them in the neck area and give them subcutaneously if the directions indicate that as a route. Injections cause lesions that ruin the value of the meat and the neck is the lowest value area that will work well. Vaccines should be given at 3-4 weeks, repeated at 6-8 weeks with a final injection at 6 months of age. The first combination product should be a 7-way Clostridial (*Clostridium chauvoei-septicum-novyi-sordellii-perfringens* C&D) and the second combination an injection of IBR (Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis), PI3 (parainfluenza 3), BVD (Bovine Virus Diarrhea) and BRSV (Bovine Respiratory Syncytial Virus). This second product can be given in a killed or a modified live virus (MLV) form. The MLV form must be prepared just prior to time of injection. The extra should be discarded as directed. The killed product is cheaper and works well on steers but the MLV would be better if you were raising heifers that will be used for reproduction.

Getting ready for the show

One of the first steps in preparing for show day is to halter break the calf. Start in a small area that the calf is used to. Be patient, calm, and ensure you and your calf are safe. Let the calf feel the halter and see the lead rope. It is very beneficial to let the calf drag the lead rope around for a couple of days. Teach the calf to lead in a small area where he can't get away, but where you have enough room to walk patterns. A chain halter that puts pressure on the lower jaw is helpful. Pulling the lead rope creates pressure. When the calf steps forward the pressure is released, rewarding the calf for a positive behavior. This must be repeated over and over until the calf follows and stops willingly with little pressure. When tying the calf, always tie its head up to encourage this posture in the ring. As soon as possible, wash the calf as this helps assert your role as master. Ask your local Extension Agent for more detailed information on washing and clipping your calf.

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