

## Creep Feeding Beef Calves

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Creep feeding is a practice that requires careful evaluation. Creep feeding can add extra weight to a suckling calf, however, the cost of the necessary feed must be less than the value of the extra weight produced if it is going to add profits to the beef operation.

Should a producer creep feed his/her calves? This will depend on the situation. If there is adequate feed for a good producing cow and grain prices are high, then it should not be done. If there is limited feed available, cows have limited milking ability and grain prices are low then creep feeding should be considered. All of the above factors interact so all factors must be considered when making the decision.

As creep feeding is considered, it is essential to determine how much it will increase the body condition of calves. If the extra feed adds too much condition, it may decrease the price per pound of the calf. Also heifers that get too fat from creep feeding may have a lowered milk production potential because of fat deposition in the udder. Too much fat put on the calf from creep feed may also reduce backgrounding gains.

Research indicates that creep feeding can add an additional .1 to .25 pounds per day additional gain. The question is the economics of providing the creep feed.

Producers must consider feed efficiency when making the decision to creep feed. Look at the following table. If there is an 8:1 feed conversion and feed is \$0.03 per pound then the cost is \$0.24 cents per pound. When the conversion is 10:1 and the cost of feed is \$0.07 per pound, then the cost is \$0.70 per pound of gain. Look at the table for other combinations of feed conversions and feed costs.

**Table 1. Cost/Lb. Of Gain from Creep Feeding<sup>1</sup>**

Feed Consumed	Cost of Feed per CWT (\$)				
	3.00	4.00	5.00	6.00	7.00
Per Lb of					
Extra Gain	Cost of Gain (Cents/Lb.)				
4	12	16	20	24	28
6	18	24	30	36	42
8	24	32	40	48	56
10	30	40	50	60	70
12	36	48	60	72	84
14	42	56	70	84	98

<sup>1</sup>Source: Creep Feeding Nursing Beef Calves, Tennessee Cow-Calf Handbook, Fact Sheet SR 3005, 1996.

If the decision to creep feed is made, what kind of feed should be used? Many excellent creep feeds are available from commercial vendors. Creep feed can also be mixed on the farm. One simple mixture is five parts corn and two parts oats. In some situations it may be necessary to add additional protein.

The decision to creep feed is not easy. Consider all factors to be sure that creep feeding will increase the profitability of the beef operation. For additional information on creep feeding and other beef production topics, contact the local Extension office.