

---

## Section Three

---

# Rearing a Calf

---

### ***Introduction***

Although many children still have access to calves due to the significance of the dairy industry in the Waikato and King Country regions it is increasingly common for children who do not live on farms to borrow a calf to rear as a pet for showing. Many farmers are only too happy to loan a calf due to the extra care and attention that it will receive. It is preferable to choose a heifer calf but bull calves are also accepted into the Waikato A&P Show day. Children also are increasingly rearing beef calves for show. The beef section has grown in popularity over recent years. Some people have a concern about the size of a calf in relation to a younger child. But calves make great pets and respond well to all the love and attention that a child can bestow on them. Calves 'love' all the grooming, washing and regular feeding. With time and attention the calf will form a trusting relationship and enjoy 'hanging out' with its handler.

### ***Recommended Materials***

#### ***Whole milk***

Meal, nuts or museli

#### ***Hay or straw***

Fresh clean water

***Brush and soap (Two brushes are recommended, one being softer than the other. Never use nylon brushes as they are too hard on the calf's skin.)***

Bucket

Cloth

Halter preferably not rope

Lead

***Shelter (warm, water proof draft free) Clean bedding (if animals are housed)***

Practice ring (optional)

Cover

### ***Selecting a Calf***

Select a calf that has been fed on colostrum for a minimum of four days as its immunity system will have been strengthened against sickness. However this is seldom a problem as most calves are selected at approximately three to four weeks of age. Encourage the child who is to rear the calf to participate in the selection process. This is an advantage as it is important for the child to have a calf that s/he likes and vice versa. The bond between the child and the calf will be instant and it can only be strengthened as they work and play together.

### ***Saving Dates for Calves***

Early Calves            10<sup>th</sup> June – 31<sup>st</sup> July

Late Calves            1<sup>st</sup> August – 20 September

These dates can be adjusted by the organising school or group to achieve a better distribution of participants in the events. This helps to distribute the awards among more participants. However the above saving dates never change for those entering the Waikato A&P Show.

### Some Recommendations for Selection

- Whenever possible select a calf from a cow which has good conformation. Often a calf chosen for calf club will be chosen by eye appraisal only as it is not necessary for the Breeding Worth (BW) to be known. This calf is a child's pet. However a calf from a cow that has good conformation and breeding is likely to inherit some of the parent's good qualities such as health and temperament. Always choose a friendly calf.
- Select a calf that has balance. For example, the calf has a very alert head, is bright, has fine shoulders and a straight back line.
- If possible choose a calf with a soft skin, fine coat and hair that sits flat as it is easier for children to groom.
- After selection it is recommended that the child should take over the responsibility of caring for the calf as soon as possible. The child needs to be part of the rearing programme in order to establish a strong bond with his/her calf.
- Give the calf a name and record its date of birth and breed.

It is recommended not to choose the calf too soon as boredom can set in for both. On selection the calf will require a warm waterproof shed with a clean, dry floor. Use dry shavings or straw for the bedding. The shed should be situated in a very sunny position so that the calf can enjoy the extra warmth. Frequently check that the calf's shelter is clean. Also cover the calf from the cold weather. The cover assists the calf to shed loose hair and promotes a shiny coat. On hot days the cover can be removed. Keep the cover clean and give it an occasional wash.

A cover can be made from a clean sack or can be purchased from an agricultural stock and station store. (Covers fashioned from plastic fabrics are not recommended.) To avoid chaffing ensure that the cover is not too heavy on the calf. Chaffing can sometimes be seen over the top of the tail and around the neck as these are the areas that the cover seam sits upon. It is in these corresponding areas on the cover that the belts are sown causing a constant pressure that may cause chaffing and discomfort. If necessary sow soft fabric over the cover seams where it sits across the top of the tail and the neck. It is also an advantage to line the cover with a blanket with one side covered with a silk fabric. Attach this blanket to the inside of the cover in such a manner that it can be removed and frequently washed. Ensure that the silk surface lies against the body of the calf. This helps to generate heat, assists in giving the calf a shiny coat and aids the movement of the cover against the calf's body. In placing the cover on the calf make sure that the front and back belts are not too tight to prevent any chaffing and remember that calves are continuously growing, therefore the cover needs to be adjusted frequently.

### ***Daily Care of a Calf***

An affinity between animal and the child can rapidly develop as a result of handling, grooming, leading and feeding. Has as already been mentioned the child should feed the calf as much as possible in order to develop a close friendship.

#### Feeding

Due to the calf's age it will have already begun a feeding programme to maintain its health. The following methods are recommendations that are useful to feed a calf:

#### ***Methods for Feeding a Calf***

- Bottle and teat

- Drinking from a clean bucket or container
- Udder Mudders
- Calfaterias

Ensure that all drinking vessels are thoroughly washed and cleaned in warm water after each feed to prevent sickness. After each feed wipe the calf's mouth with a damp cloth to prevent any build-up of dried milk that can form a crust resulting in sores. Feeding methods are subject to frequent revision, so take any opportunity of help from an experienced parent or dairy farmer to plan a feeding programme. Sufficient feed should be given to maintain warmth and promote growth. Over-feeding can cause scours. If scouring occurs the child should consult an adult without delay. To avoid creating surpluses of stale milk make up only sufficient quantity for an individual feed. The calf should have access to clean fresh water and pasture at all times. Provide good meadow hay, barley straw and fresh meal, nuts or museli in measured quantities.

The calf needs to be fed milk regularly, at least twice daily. Use whole milk or a proprietary brand. Try to make feeding time at approximately the same time each day and use the milk not only as a method to promote warmth and growth but also as a reward. This helps the calf to develop an expectation that after grooming and a walk their will always be a drink of milk. As the calf grows increase the supply of milk and expect to feed it for approximately 10-12 weeks. Although the supply of grass, hay and meal concentrates is increased during the rearing programme it is recommended not to eliminate milk from the daily feed programme. Milk retains the 'bloom' on the calf and is an advantage on show days. Dry feed such as meal should always been fresh and kept free of access by birds and rodents.

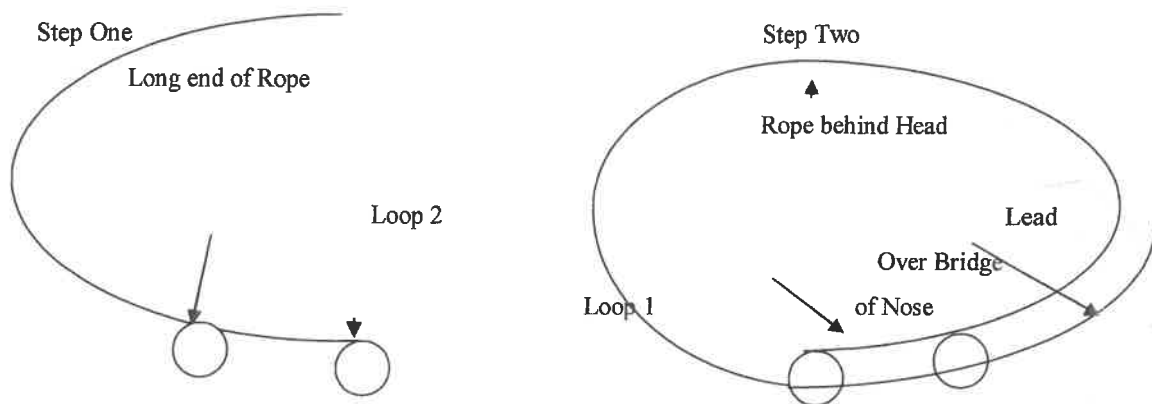
## Handling

During feed times pat and brush the calf while talking to it in a gentle and friendly manner. Spend time with the calf as this all assists in the development of trust and loyalty. Trust is a vital aspect that demands time and determination if the calf is to feel secure and confident working with the child. When the calf has become accustomed to handling at feed times then introduce it to a halter. Initially the calf should be tethered for short periods gradually lengthening the time span. Always tether the calf in a safe environment. Never tie it to barbed wire or standing on concrete as in the case of being frightened the calf may be seriously injured. A calf should never be dragged or hit. If this occurs it will immediately pull back on the lead and resist all attempts to walk in a correct manner. Hitting a calf will only create mistrust and will associate handling with punishment. The child needs to begin working with the calf in a caring and friendly manner in order to create a lasting trust and bond.

Once the calf is used to the halter the child can begin taking it for walks. Remember just as people enjoy looking at a new environment, so do calves. Take it to as many different places as possible, introducing it to different sights, sounds, actions, people and other animals. As the calf grows lengthen the distance and have it walk in the manner that is expected in the ring to avoid it forming any bad habits. It is impossible to change a style of walking on or just before the show days. See *Learning to Walk with a Calf*, (page 14). While out walking, the child should continue to talk to the calf as well as practicing turns, stops and the pigtail (turning clockwise). Before the child and the calf know it they will have practiced all the aspects of leading and developed competence in walking around the ring together.

The handling of any calf is greatly assisted with the use of a good halter that is both comfortable for the calf and safe for the child. The halter can be made from either soft rope or leather. It is preferable for the calf to have two halters one of which is used only on show day. However this is not necessary. A simple practice halter can be made by tying an eight-centimetre loop at one end of the rope and another eight-centimetre loop positioned a few centimetres away. See Figure Four, (page 14). The

length between these two loops must fit comfortably over the bridge of the calf's nose. The long end of the rope passes behind the back of the calf's head and through the two loops and to pass under the calf's jawbone. See Figure Four below.



**Figure Four: Practice Halter**

#### Grooming

Daily grooming is a very important aspect of this project. The calf should be brushed all over. For example the legs, head, tail, tummy, neck and body. Special attention should be given to the uncovered areas. A comb for the tail and a firm brush and damp hands make good tools to remove the loose hair from the calf's coat. Never use a sharp object such as a hacksaw blade to remove loose hair as this practice will damage the skin causing the coat to look dull and coarse. Check that the cover is not too tight and adjust as required. Look very carefully for any lice under the brisket, between the front legs, around the jaw and nose, on the neck and between the back legs. See Health Problems and Some Solutions for Calves, (page 18).

Before each show day it is an advantage to wash the calf as this enhances its appearance. Wash the calf approximately three days before show days to allow time for the coat to flatten down and the oils to return. There are many proprietary brands available but warm water and sunlight soap do an excellent job. Rinse off the soap with warm water in which a sprig of rosemary has been allowed to steep for a few minutes. This practice removes the soap from the hair and assists the coat to regain its soft shiny appearance. Rub the calf all over with a dry towel, concentrating not only on its back but also under the brisket and belly. Brush the calf and cover it immediately. To prevent any possibility of it catching a chill do not allow the calf to be standing wet.

#### Learning to Walk with a Calf

**Leading a calf correctly is a great achievement in itself as it encompasses all the interactions between the child and the calf. A child and calf that can walk together with confidence helps to denote that many hours of work, care, attention and practice has been put into this project. Once the child**

***and the calf have mastered leading they will always walk as a team. Leading also encompasses holding the lead safely and correctly. The following dangerous habits are to be avoided at all times as some of them directly compromise the safety of the child and the calf. They are:***

- Wrapping the lead around hands
- Fingers through rings on halter or lead
- Never release the right hand from the lead
- Never allow the lead to drag on the ground

Once the calf has accepted the halter, will tie up and relax it is time to practice leading (walking) every day. Refer to Handling, (page 13). To prevent interference with the calf's vision the child should always stand behind the ear and in front of the calf's shoulder. The child should hold the lead firmly in the right hand as this hand acts as the steering hand and brake. At no time while walking should the child take the right hand off the lead. If a child is left-handed then these recommendations will need to be adapted. Hold the lead approximately 15-25cm away from the side of the calf's head as there must be a gap between the child and the calf. The lead should be held in the right hand that is clenched to form a fist with the palm facing up. There should be a length of lead between the hands. Take the lead firmly in the left hand, form a fist with the palm facing down. In short the right palm is always facing 'up' and the left palm is always facing 'down.' Ensure that the lead between the hands never hangs below the top of the child's knees to avoid tripping. See Figure Five below.

Figure Five: Holding the Lead in the Correct Manner

If the lead should be a little too long fold it into the left hand until the end hangs approximately 30-45cm. Ensure that the child's fingers are over the top of the lead. There must never be any fingers through loops to prevent the possibility of the child being dragged by a frightened calf. If the calf should become frightened and bolt then the lead will just unravel leaving the child standing.

The child can use a slight forward flick or motion with the lead in the right hand to start the calf walking and a gentle backward motion with the lead to stop the calf. To prevent the calf from having to stop suddenly the child can anticipate the stop and very gently with a backward movement of the right hand stop the calf. It is frequent practice with the calf that will install knowledge of these commands. Commands need to be consistent to enable the calf to know what to expect. It is recommended not to practice leading in a formal manner until approximately three weeks before the first show day to prevent the calf becoming bored with the routine. Remember if the child has been walking the calf daily in the correct manner, when the time comes for a more concentrated effort most of the work has already been done. See Handling, page 13).

### Ring work

It is an advantage to erect a ring that is similar to the measurements and layout that is used for show days. Place the pegs to mark the course and use it daily, approximately a week before the first show day. If the calf is familiar with the work in the ring then its chances of success are enhanced. Familiarity leads to confidence and security between the child and the calf. With lots of practice and patience the calf will become used to changes and the show days will just be another interesting experience. See Handling, (page 13) and Learning to Walk with a Calf (page 14).



***This event focuses on the cleanliness of the calf, the rapport, understanding and knowledge that a child has. The focus is on the following aspects:***

- **Care**
- Cleanliness
- Condition
- Knowledge about the calf, its needs and behaviour
- Name, date of birth and breed
- Type of food the calf has been fed and how it has been reared
- Diseases to look for and how to treat them
- Happy moments during the project

(The above aspects are only some that may arise.)

The child will be expected to present a calf that they have reared and worked with and is in excellent condition with have a very clean coat. The calf should be well brushed, show no evidence of chaffing and have very little loose hair. The legs, hooves, between the 'claws,' tail, belly, nose, eyes, and ears should all be clean. The inside of the ears should be wiped only to the 'crinkled' region to avoid any possibility of damage to the calf's hearing. This is a delicate region and should never be cleaned with cotton wool buds. A damp cloth on the end of the child's finger is sufficient to clean the inside of the ear. **Clipping, oiling the coat or nuggeting the hooves is not permitted.**

### ***Type or Conformation***

This class is a great opportunity for children to learn basic discernment in selecting a sound animal. The focus is on structure and utility. Dairy type can be divided into heavy and light breeds (not necessary if numbers are low) and is applicable only for calves of dairy origin. Dairy calves are divided into light or heavy breeds due to the requirements of breed characteristics for specific breeds. The dairy breeds are classified into the following type:

#### **Light**

Jersey  
Ayrshire  
Guernsey

#### **Heavy**

Friesian  
Shorthorn

Due to the number of crossbred dairy cows entering the national herd there are many calves that will display characteristics of either their dam or their sire. Check with the head steward if there is any confusion regarding light or heavy type.

### ***Dairy Type (Conformation)*** (Female progeny only)

***The focus is on the conformation or structure of a calf of dairy origin. See Some Recommendations for Selection, (page 11). In this event the judge will look for the positive attributes that make for a 'balanced' calf. This process can begin with looking at the calf's head, beginning with the jaw to check that it is not 'under or over shot' and that the eyes and ears are positioned to form an alert looking calf. The calf's legs should be***

***checked to ensure that it walks in the correct manner and the brisket should be checked for width. Notice should be taken of the 'spring of the rib,' checking for ample capacity that will enable the heart plenty of room to pump oxygenated blood around the body. There should also be plenty of loose skin over the ribs and width between them to indicate capacity for future growth. The structure across the pelvis and pin bones should be checked to ensure that the calf has 'ease of calving' as a cow. The child will be asked to walk the calf towards and away from the judge so s/he can check that the calf walks freely and correctly. The calf should display an overall balance and femininity.***

#### Beef Conformation (Type)

This event is for calves of beef origin and is judged in a similar manner to the dairy type. It is also suitable for animals that are not eligible for the Dairy Type event. It is often mistakenly believed that the biggest beef calf will be selected. However there is plenty of precedence to suggest that this is not so as the judge will look for an animal that has the potential to grow for an industry dependent upon marketing prime products. The beef animal not only has to have a 'sound' frame but must also be suitable for breeding purposes as well as the local or export trade.

#### ***Health Problems and Some Solutions for Calves***

To rear a healthy calf it is important that the child and the parent/caregiver keep a check on the condition and habits of the calf. See Role of Child and Parents/Caregivers, (page 35). Frequently check for lice, particularly after show days. Infestation by those tiny creatures can cause a rapid decline in both general health and bloom. If lice is discovered it can be eradicated by using a proprietary lice powder. Read the manufacturer's directions carefully before application. **Note:** it is recommended that "pour-on" products not be used on calves that are being prepared for showing as these products require extremely careful application. If it is necessary to use one of these products the calf should be over six weeks of age and the application undertaken by an adult. There are many proprietary powders suitable to treat lice that are safer to administer and just as effective. The powder can be rubbed all over the calf's body or if it is used as a precautionary measure placed along the calf's back, under the brisket and between the back legs to ensure a good coverage.

Another health problem is scours. This can occur in a calf whose feeding regime has been changed. However scours occurs more commonly in a calf that is drinking too much or has picked the bacterium up from the ground or another calf. This problem should be treated immediately to assist the calf to make a full recovery. Scours is often treated by feeding the calf a solution of electrolytes that is obtainable from a vet who will also supply instructions.

Of significance to the cattle industry is the incidence of Tuberculosis (TB) among the herds. In a move to eradicate TB from the national herd the Ministry of Agriculture has a strict policy on animal health which sets out regulations under the Biosecurity Act 1993. Calves from herds whose owners are registered with the Livestock Improvement Corporation's (LIC) MINDA™ identification (ID) programme can continue to use that system. All other owners of cattle are covered by the regulations of the Animal Health Board under which it is compulsory for each calf over the age of one month to wear an ear tag that displays a bar code, the herd number and the calf's number. It is also compulsory that all calves must travel accompanied with a TB



certificate, both to any show and on returning home. The certificate must be shown if an officer from MAF should ask to see it. For further information ring freephone 0800 437243 or 0800-ID SCHEME.

