

MULTIPLE SUCKLING FOR REARING DAIRY REPLACEMENTS AND DAIRY BEEF

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Calves reared by multiple suckling grow faster, are less prone to disease and convert milk to gain more efficiently than artificially fed calves (Moss 1977). Labour requirement is low and the system is versatile. Multiple suckling offers the dairy farmer a low cost method of rearing calves for dairy or beef production.

Our study examined free access suckling four calves/cow on freshly calved cows, and weaning at 70 or 300 days. Twelve cows were used, six receiving 5.4 kg maize/day for 100 days and six unsupplemented. The animals grazed dryland green panic (Panicum maximum var. trichoglume) - glycine (Glycine wightii cv. Tinaroo) pastures at Kairi Research Station on the Atherton Tableland. Pastures were stocked at 1.6 cows/ha reducing to 1.3 cows/ha in July (winter dry season). Two calves were weaned off each cow after 70 days. They grazed green panic-glycine pastures and received 1.0 kg of 5:1 maize:bloodmeal supplement to six months of age. These calves were reared as herd replacements or for turn off as two year old butchers steers. Remaining calves continued to suckle until they were slaughtered at 300 days. Half of these calves received 2.0 kg maize/day from 240-300 days. Calves were Friesian or Friesian Sahiwal cross breeds.

The observed greater gains to 70 days (0.05 ± 0.43 kg/day) and heavier weaning weights (69.4 ± 64.4 kg) of the calves of supplemented cows were not statistically significant ($P = 0.08$). Cow supplementation had no effect on calf live weight at 300 days (274 ± 275 kg for supplemented and control cows). Suckled calves grew faster from 70 to 182 days (0.82 ± 0.51 kg/day) and were much heavier ($P < 0.01$) at six months than those weaned at 70 days (161 ± 121 kg). The advantages in daily gain (0.88 ± 0.80 kg/day) and final weight (282 ± 267 kg) of calves fed maize from 240 to 300 days were not significant ($P = 0.075$). Sahiwal cross calves, although lighter at birth than Friesians (31.5 ± 37.1 kg ($P < 0.05$)), gained faster throughout the experiment (0.83 ± 0.75 kg/day), were heavier at turn off (284 ± 265 kg ($P < 0.05$)), and had a higher dressing percentage ($52\% \pm 48\%$ cold dressed weight).

Multiple suckling four calves/cow and early weaning on to pasture with high protein supplements produced gains suitable for herd replacements or two year old slaughter cattle. Continued double suckling resulted in high calf gains and animals suited to the local yearling beef market. Supplementation of calves could improve final live weight and finish but was not necessary in this experiment. Supplementation of cows in early lactation did not give an economic increase in calf performance. Suckling of calves for the entire lactation may be attractive where there is a premium market for young beef.

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