

River View Veterinary Service Newsletter

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News and Upcoming Events:

- Vet Camp 2017 is June 5-9! Be watching our Facebook page as campers will be learning about large animal medicine!

*Welcome to the River View Veterinary Service Newsletter,
designed to provide cattle producers with
timely information and education on a variety of topics.
Sarah Foust, DVM and Terry Foust, DVM*

Early Weaning

In areas where forage quality is low and quantity is not adequate in summer and early fall, early weaning could be a management practice. Early weaning can enhance the recovery of cyclicity (ability for cows to breed back) on thin cows.

Calves lack a rumen microbial population to process forage until they begin to consume significant amounts (1.5-2 pounds per day for 3 consecutive days) of solid foods. This usually happens around 45 days of age. This is the earliest that beef calves could be weaned. In dairy calves, where grain is supplemented as early as a few days of age, the rumen may be well-developed and ready for solid feeds as early as 4 weeks of age. Encouraging grain intake in dairy calves will speed the process of development of the rumen, as it takes 21 days from the first ingestion of grain to rumen papillae development.

There are many benefits to early weaning, both in terms of the calf and the cow. The calf will grow more efficiently, needing less feed to reach desired weights. Cows can be supplemented and gain weight back more efficiently, without the need to produce milk. This will, in turn, enhance their return to cyclicity and help them breed back more quickly.

There are also risks or detriments to early weaning. If the calf's rumen is not adequately developed, the calf will suffer a growth slump. Also, early weaned calves create another feeding group that must be managed, costing more in labor and time. Nutrition must be closely monitored in these calves. Specialized facilities may be needed for feeding and housing smaller calves. Vaccination and dehorning schedules may need to be adjusted, as well.

While early weaning may not be ideal for every herd, it becomes another tool in the producer's toolbox. This tool can be helpful in times of low quality feeds or in thin cows. If you have questions about when to wean your calves, give us a call!