



## Brockett's Ag Advice

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### Calf Management

Calf management is a much neglected part of farm management. Many dairymen get too busy doing "More Important Things" and thus relegate calf care to whoever is available or maybe to no one.

Other dairymen feel a financial bind and try to cut expenses by "cheaping" their calf-raising program.

Those who follow either one of these destructive policies know little about financial management, because the end result is self

defeating.

Either the heifer becomes stunted forever or it winds up costing the business even more money to put that animal into the milking string on a full-scale basis. One reason why so many first-calf heifers do so poorly in relation to their genetic ability is because of a poor start in life.

Which would you rather do - spend 75 cents a day to feed a calf properly or \$1.35 a day to play catch up when the calf reaches 12 months of age or lose part (5 to 20%) of your milk production after she has freshened?

Calves need TLC. They also need ample quantities of good quality,

clean feed, both grain and forage; lots of clean, dry bedding; freedom from dampness and drafts; and isolation from wastes of older animals. All of these items are required. It is not a case of where you can do a good job in one area then neglect another area and have everything turn out right.

### Hay For Calves

Hay - good quality hay - is an essential part of most good but economical calf raising programs. Warning: a calf has a somewhat limited hay storage tank (stomach, gut, rumen).

If you insist on feeding them a lot of stemmy, coarse, low-quality hay, the response will be slow growth.

If you feed them too much real high quality, pure alfalfa hay, the response may be scours.

Best bet is a fine stemmed, grassy alfalfa hay that is free from mold and mustiness.

Start calves on this type of hay as soon as possible. We always put a little hay in front of them on day 1. Some calves get bored and start nibbling on it within a few days, while others may take as long as 2 weeks to start working on their hay. Clean out the hay rack periodically so they have fresh hay in front of them most of the time.

### Grain and Protein

Calves need sufficient protein so they can maintain a fairly rapid growth rate. At first they may be somewhat finicky so you may need to sweeten up the grain with molasses. The important thing is to get them to eating hay and grain as soon as possible.

You will reduce the incidence of scours considerably once they are on full feed. Grain should never be left in the box more than from one feeding to the next. The grain box should be cleaned out every day, especially in warm weather.

Do not, under any circumstances, put fresh feed on top of waste material or old feed. If a cat decides to use a feed box as a nice resting place, either get rid of the cat or cover the box so the cat can not get into it (of course, you will have to leave it open enough so the calf can eat).

**When**  
When does a calf become old enough to graduate into the "well, we can neglect them now" stage? The answer is never, but you can reduce vigilance somewhat once they are 10 days past weaning. That does not mean neglect.

She must be kept growing if you are going to wind up with an animal that will produce economically to her genetic potential. The time when most farmers goof up in their calf raising is between weaning and age of 6 months. They are generally very undemanding at that age.

As long as you give them something to chew on and feed them when they see or hear you feed the cows or other animals, they are fairly quiet. They are not big enough yet to fend for themselves even if they had enough room to do so. Many farms feed them off the floor or with older animals. Some farmers even turn them out into a pasture of sorts. The results: poor growth, parasites, haybelly, rough coats, etc.

Calves up to 6 months still need good quality hay. At 3 months you can substitute some good silage for part of that hay, but remember what happens with your little kids if they drink too much water before dinner. Those calves will still need some grassy-alfalfa hay. They also need good quality grain (14 to 18% protein, depending on the protein in your hay) in a quantity of 4 to 5 pounds per day. At 2 months of age their appetites are such that you can probably forget the molasses.

### Measure Them

At least up to 6 months of age you should measure them once a month. I can hear some of you now - Wow! - That takes time. O.K. I'll back off if you will do it just once then see how they compare with the norm. If your calves are even 85% of normal then perhaps you can skip this chore.

I suspect that many of you will have at least 10 excuses as to why your calves are so far below

(Turn to Page D20)

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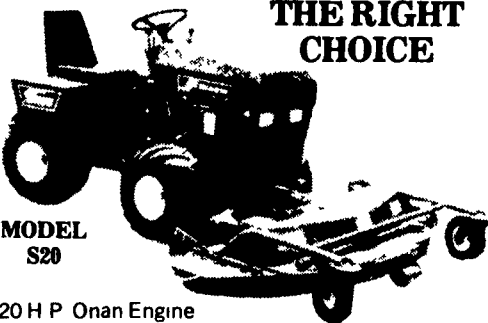
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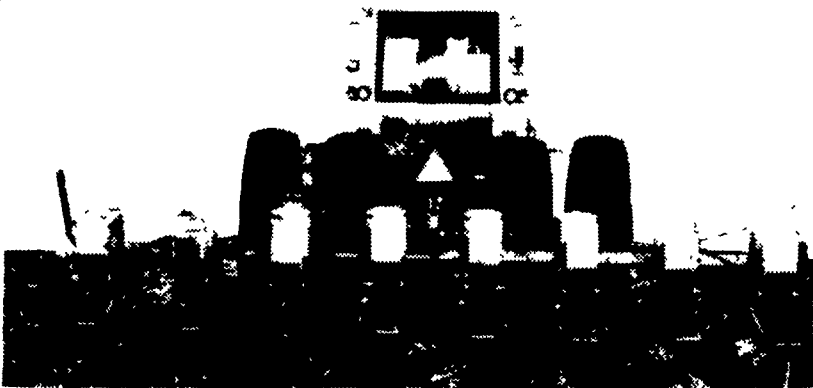
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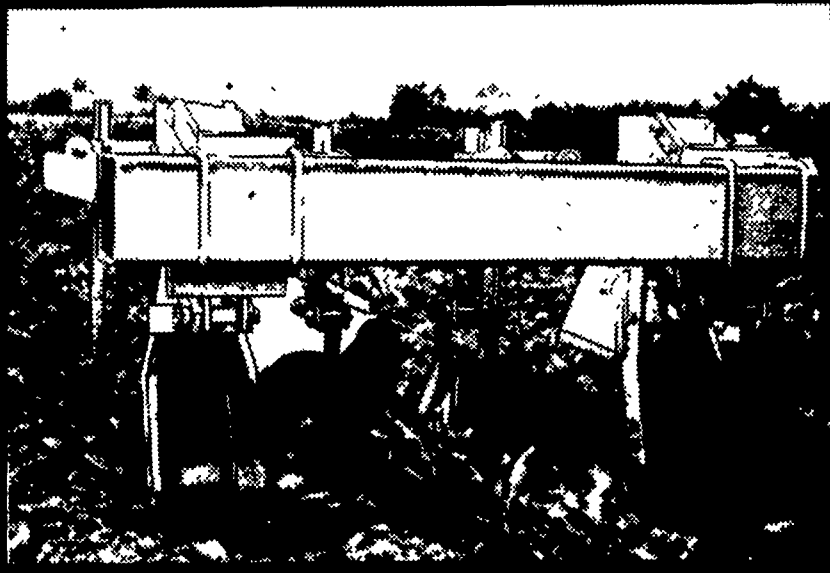
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