

WELL-HONED REARING SYSTEM GROWS GREAT CALVES

It may be simple, but a tried and tested calf rearing system in South Waikato proves you don't have to get complicated to get great results, year after year.

In this case, recycled 200 litre drums, raw eggs and restricted entry for the calf shed help the Bernhards of Putaruru raise big, healthy heifers and beef cross bulls with minimal disease and maximum daily growth rates, every spring.

Carol and Mark Bernhard have worked hard over the years to build up what was originally his family's home farm to a business that today peak milks 370 cows on 126 ha (effective). They simultaneously sharemilked multiple properties, ran a contracting business and watched what they spent.



Even so, when Peach Teats first became available several years ago, boss calf rearer Carol started buying them, and has never stopped.

“I remember seeing them for the first time, and thinking they were really cool because of the valve.”

Hundreds of calves later, she and Mark still fit pull-through Peach Teats to home-made 200 L recycled drum feeders. Carol also uses Peach Teats to bottle-feed warm colostrum to new born calves where necessary.

“They're easy to put on, and easy to teach calves with,” she says. “The milk's right there, young calves don't have to suck too hard to get a drink.”

She rears 100 calves a year, including Jersey and Friesian-cross herd replacements, bulls for sale at 4 days old and Hereford cross bulls to finish on farm.

Ad-libbed colostrum milk for their first three weeks, they then have hay added to their diet. Meal is introduced at four weeks. Hay and water is freely available once milk is no longer ad-libbed.

“It's nice and simple, and it works for us. We keep everything very clean, and we don't like anybody coming into the shed. We hardly ever get scours, or bugs. If we do get a calf scouring a bit, we give them a whole raw egg, shell and all,” Carol says.

“That's an old farming remedy – the membrane in the shell curdles the milk and stops the scour. We also use bentonite if we need to, but mostly they're very healthy. We only had to give electrolytes to three calves last year.”

Results speak for themselves. Jersey heifer calves wean at 100kg; Friesians at 120kg and Hereford cross 120kg or more.

This was a topic of some discussion at the 2018 Dairy Women's Network conference (DWN) in Rotorua, which was a good chance to do some informal benchmarking, Carol says.

It was her first DWN conference, and comparing weaning weights with other DWN members was far from the only benefit. “I found it all very useful, and I learned a lot. It was well worth the experience.”

Keen to find out more about Peach Teats from Skellerup? Ask your local rural retailer today or visit www.skellerup.co.nz