

# Calf Notes.com

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## *Calf Note #94 – Questions anyone?*

### **Introduction**

As of this writing, Calf Notes has been in existence for just over six years. It been a great “exercise” and a chance to share information with thousands of people regarding calves and calf management. During those past six years, I’ve received hundreds of questions from people. But, I received one question recently that deserves its own Calf Note. Before getting to that question, here’s a bit on who’s asking and why.

### **Who is asking?**

Questions to Calf Notes.com come from all over the world. I have received notes and questions from people from places like Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Bangladesh, Egypt, New Zealand, Iran, Russia, Poland, Korea and places in between. They come from farmers, veterinarians, students at secondary schools and universities, feed industry representatives and pharmaceutical company representatives. Most come from producers who are interested in solving a problem or improving their management.

Many questions and notes come from producers with very large farms. These farms are tens of thousands of calves raised every year. However, a lot of questions have come from small producers or “backyard” farms with one or two calves.

Calf Notes is translated into Spanish and Portuguese. Unfortunately, I don’t speak enough of either of these languages to respond to a person sending me a question in Spanish or Portuguese. Occasionally, I will get a question in Spanish, which I have to return to ask for translation.

### **Why ask me?**

Well, that’s a good question! I guess that running a web site and writing about calf management makes me an “expert”. It’s important to keep in mind that many “experts” have never actually owned or operated the business they’re so expert in – so, while they may know a lot of “book” knowledge, their ability to give really meaningful information to producers is a rare gift.

I look at my children’s grandparents as experts. When they come to visit (which is rarely), they walk around acting and feeling important. They know everything (after all, they raised THEIR children, right?) and they feel free to give advice on any and all sorts of topics (especially child rearing). Then, they get in the car and leave before the extent of the damage they inflicted is clear. And when we call to complain about our kids, our grandparents take great comfort in knowing that IF we had just taken THEIR advice, everything would be perfect! So, that’s an expert.

### **What are people asking?**

Most Calf Notes deal with young, preweaned calves. Some people call them “bottle” or “wet” calves. Therefore, the questions I received are based on this small subset of the population. Without a doubt, the most common questions related to disease – primarily diarrhea. Here are some of the questions I have received over the past few months (and a short answer):

- My calf has scours – what do I do? *See Calf Notes 21, 42 and 43*
- Are Jersey calves different from Holsteins? *Yes! Jerseys are different... we just don't understand enough of these differences.*
- Where can I find information on veal calves? *There are web sites that contain links and resources for raising veal. A quick Google search will get you more information.*
- How much  $\beta$ -hydroxybutyrate is produced in the rumens of calves? *See Calf Note 55*
- How long to feed colostrum? *See Calf Notes 1, 2, and 3.*
- Does the development of the intestine relate to a calf's survival? *Absolutely. The intestine is one of the most metabolically active organs in the body. It also is the largest immune organ in the body.*
- Are there differences in feeding whole milk vs. milk replacer? *Yes. Whole milk has greater amounts of protein and fat and generally has less iron and vitamins than fortified milk replacer.*
- Can I use a mob feeder to increase intake of milk? *Yes. See Calf Note #7.*
- What about “accelerated” or “intensified” feeding programs? *See Calf Notes 84 and 85.*
- Total protein and colostrum in the serum of calves – are they related? *Yes. Generally, when calves drink colostrum, both the level of IgG and total protein increase within the first 24 hours of life. You can use total protein (easy to measure) as an approximation of IgG (harder to measure).*
- Why won't this silly (stupid) calf eat any starter? *There are lots of possible reasons. Make sure the calf is healthy, has water available and make sure the starter is good quality. It will eat starter when it gets hungry!*

### **A great question...**

A few weeks ago, I received a question from a calf grower who really enjoyed raising calves. This person (we'll call her Sally) had worked on a calf ranch for several years and was interested in buying her own place and getting into the business. This is an important question, since the heifer growing industry is becoming much more developed and many producers are looking for growers to raise calves for them. So, a very important question and one with tremendous implications to Sally and the calves she's thinking about growing.

Here's an excerpt of what I wrote:

Dear “Sally”,

My advice to you is this -- find people who are doing this (running a business of raising calves) now. Talk to them - in as much detail as they are comfortable with. Talk about specifics - money, costs, charges, profit margins, etc. Talk about programs - health, nutrition, housing. Ask as many questions as they'll let you. Keep asking until they throw you out. Then call them! Seriously, it's important to find out as much as possible about ALL aspects of the business as you can. If you have the resources, visit some places in parts of your country further away. If you live in the U.S., travel to WI and CA and see how things are done there. It might be a good investment to spend a couple hundred dollars if it can save

you thousands later.

Read, read and read some more. Calf Notes, Calving Ease and the PDHGA (<http://www.pdhga.org>) are good places to start. Go onto the internet and read as much as you can about the heifer business.

Write down a plan, once you have completed the two tasks above. Be as specific as possible, including possible customers, how much to charge, what you expect your costs to be, etc. If you are going to get financing, you'll need a business plan.

Depending on where you live, the Extension service might be able to help out also.

Here's a bit more information that I didn't include in my short e-mail reply.

The key, Sally, is the word "business". Anyone who is going to raise calves for a living is going to make a "business". There's so much more to the business part of calf raising than just feeding and caring for calves. The owner has to deal with issues like labor, finances, taxes, inventory, loans, environmental permits and regulations, record keeping and a myriad of other parts of running a business – any business – that can go unseen to those of us who are not actually running the show.

My advice to Sally was to talk to people, especially about money! Calf raising is a business. It's about making enough money (income) to exceed the expenses you have and to make a profit. If you can't cover your expenses or make enough of a profit, then you won't be raising calves for long. You also have to remember that you'll be competing with others for the business of raising people's calves. You need to do it better or cheaper (or both). Your product (calves) must have value worth their cost. It's easy to only think about the "fun" part of the business – the calves. But, there's so much more to running a farm (a business!) than the animals. The truly successful calf growers understand this and are students not only of the calves, but also of how to run a successful business.

The successful calf grower also has a team of "experts" that can help with all aspects of the operation – the vet, feed rep, business consultant, extension agent, banker and others can serve as a resource base for making the decisions and setting priorities for the operation. Ultimately, Sally will have to make the decisions and live with the consequences. She will succeed or fail in her business.

A successful grower will also have a plan. It's always best if it's written down, but some people only have "mental" plans. You need to know where you want to be in one, three and five years and have a plan on how to get there. Goals can change and so will the plans needed to achieve them. Evaluate your goals and plans periodically to see if you are making the kind of progress you hoped.

Sally, go into this new venture with a good plan and as much information as possible. Be a student of the calves, but also of the calf business. Be optimistic and be sure of your goals. Know your product, but also know your market. Differentiate yourself from the competition and you'll do very well. Best of luck!

**Written by Dr. Jim Quigley (27 July 2003)**  
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