

Technical Note

# **Weaner Nutrition**

**GrainCorp**  
Liquid Feeds



# Weaner Nutrition

## Background

Investing resources (time and money) into weaner nutrition, especially post weaning nutrition, has many benefits and can significantly enhance the bottom line of a breeding operation. Subsequent breeder fertility, weaner growth and development and feedlot performance can all be improved through sound weaner nutrition and management.

Some important principles to be considered include:

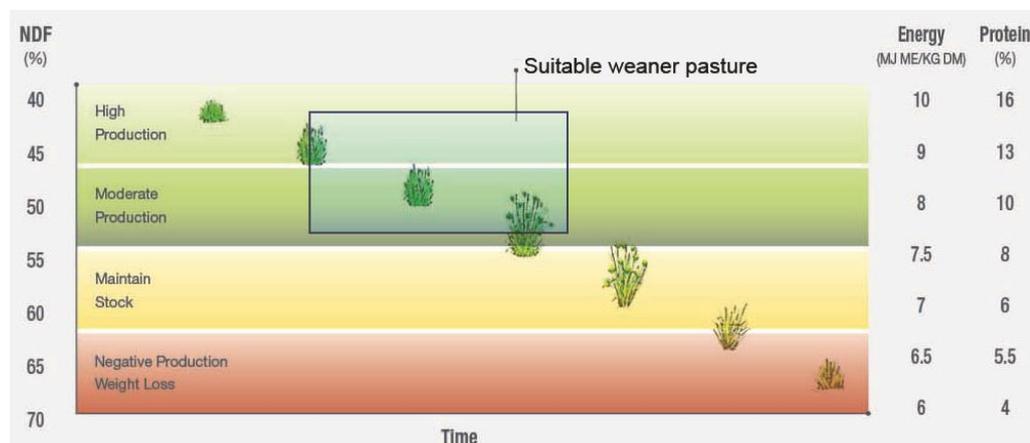
- Calves should be weaned early when pastures are unable to adequately sustain the cow and her calf.
- In order to achieve production targets, cattle, and young animals in particular, should be on a rising plane of nutrition throughout their lives; ideally with an average growth rate of 0.6kg/day.
- Ideally breeders should be in body score condition of 3.5 at calving to have a good chance of conceiving while rearing her current calf.
- Breeders must conceive within 75 days of calving to produce a calf every 12 months.
- Strategic weaning to maintain breeder body condition will improve re-conception rates.
- Develop a weaning plan to suit the quality of your pasture and your production goals.
- Implement a weaning strategy that ensures consistent growth of your cattle despite seasonal conditions.

Weaning is a stressful period during which a calf is forced to adapt from a diet of predominantly milk to a diet of forage. Generally, calves are weaned at 8-10 months though the actual age depends on several factors. In severe drought, calves may be weaned as early as six weeks if managed carefully and fed a high protein diet.

Nutrition during weaning is important economically given it has a direct effect on post weaning growth, long term growth, overall health, meat quality and importantly, the reproductive performance of replacement heifers.

To maintain rumen function and minimise the stress of the weaning process, it is recommended that calves be yard weaned for 7- 10 days and fed good quality hay. If available hay is medium to low in quality, additional protein should also be provided e.g. pellets, weaner meals or protein supplements.

Once they are moved out of the weaner yards, weaners should be moved onto good pasture which is high in protein (green content) and with adequate energy.



## Achieving Your Production Targets

After assessing weaner pastures, it is important to determine whether the quality and quantity of forage is adequate to achieve your production targets. Put simply, if there isn't a high green content, a protein supplement should be provided.

The following table provides a good summary of pasture quality, weaner weights and supplement types and quantities needed to achieve target growth rates.

Weaner weight (kg)	Pasture quality	Growth target <sup>1</sup> (kg/hd/day)	Supplement types	Recommended daily intake (kg/hd/day)
Under 60	Good hay	0.4	Milk replacer and high quality calf meals <sup>2</sup>	1–1.5
60–100	Good hay or good to marginal pasture	0.25	Calf meals or pellets <sup>2</sup>	1–1.5
100–150	Poor pasture DMD <50% CP <6%	0.2	Weaner meals or pellets <sup>2</sup> , grain mixes	1–1.5
			Protein meals	0.5
			MP, MUP <sup>3,4</sup> <b>Molafos Grower and Molafos Vitameal</b>	1–1.5
100–150	Marginal pasture DMD 50–55% CP 6–7%	0.2	Protein meals	0.5
			Fortified molasses – MP, MUP <sup>3,4</sup> <b>Molafos 15 15S 20</b>	1–1.5
100–150	Good pasture DMD 55–60% CP 7–8%	0.2	None	
150–200	Poor pasture	0.1–0.2	Weaner meals or pellets, grain mixes	1.5
			Protein meals	0.5
			Fortified molasses – MP, MUP, M8U <sup>3,4</sup> <b>Molafos 15 15S 20</b>	1.5–2.0
150–200	Marginal pasture	0.2	Protein supplements (dry licks, blocks and liquid supplements) <sup>5</sup>	Sufficient to provide 75g protein/head/day
150–200	Good pasture	0.2	None	
Over 200	Poor pasture	0.1	Protein supplements (dry licks, blocks and liquid supplements)	Sufficient to provide 75g protein/head/day
		0.2	Fortified molasses – MUP, M8U <sup>3</sup> <b>Molafos 15 15S 20</b>	1.5–2.0
Over 200	Marginal pasture	0.2	Protein supplements (dry licks, blocks and liquid supplements) <sup>5</sup>	Sufficient to provide 75g protein/head/day
Over 200	Good pasture	0.2	None	

Reference: *Weaner Management in Northern Beef Herds (modified)*. Meat & Livestock Australia Limited. March 2012

Generally speaking, in order to maintain satisfactory growth and survival rates, calves should be 100kg before changing from a complete ration to a true protein-based ration. When they reach 150kg, they can then be transitioned to an inorganic protein-based supplement.

Weaners over 200kg should not be allowed to lose more than 10% of their body weight.

## Weaner Supplement Recommendations

GrainCorp Liquid Feeds manufacturers a range of products to provide the essential nutrient requirements of weaners grazing poor to moderate pastures.

Specifically suited to 100-150kg weaners are Molafos Grower and Molafos Vitameal. These products are highly palatable molasses-based supplements which are highly fortified with true protein (UDP) making them ideal for young growing animals.

For weaners weighing more than 150kg, Molafos 15, Molafos 15S and Molafos 20 are ideally suited to supplying the energy and inorganic protein required by these larger weaners to help utilize poor to moderate quality pastures. Being molasses-based, these supplements, with varying levels of sourness (S) and protein (15 and 20%) are readily accepted by young stock, ensuring sufficient supplement intakes to achieve critical production targets.

**For more information or help designing a customised weaning program, please contact GLF on 1800 333 010.**

## References

*Holroyd, R.G. and Fordyce, G. (2001) Cost effective strategies for improved fertility in extensive and semi-extensive management conditions in northern Australia. In "4<sup>th</sup> Simposio Internacional de Reproduccion Animal" pp39-60. (Marina Caccia, editor), IRAC, Cordoba, Argentina.*

*Meat & Livestock Australia. March 2012. Weaner Management in Northern Beef Herds.*