

Column Name - The Heartland Minute

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“Options for Feeding Hay to Newly Weaned Calves”

Newly weaned calves need time to adjust when they transition from a pasture to a dry lot and are expected to eat from an unfamiliar feed bunk. Cattle need to know that there is feed in the bunk and if you just dump the concentrate in there they may not find it. You can try putting some long-stem hay in the feed so that the cattle see it. You want to ensure this is a high-quality hay.

It typically takes calves two to three days to get adjusted to eating from the bunk. Another decision that you must evaluate is whether to deliver hay from a round bale feeder or grind the hay and mix it with the other feedstuffs. On one hand, hay that has been mechanically chopped and offered as feed is a smaller particle size so it is more easily digested and will break down faster in the rumen than long-stem hay. Because of this, cattle will consume more energy on a daily basis than they would if they were eating hay from a round bale.

Cattle eating from a round bale will digest the hay slower and more of that will be absorbed in the digestive tract. However, a con to feeding hay from the round bale is that cattle will waste hay as they pick through the bale to eat and it ends up falling to the ground and getting stepped on, leading to costly waste.

Grinding the hay and adding it to the feed will make it easier to control portion size, especially in a limited feeding situation. However, a downside is that the cost of equipment and the labor it takes to grind the hay and feed can be too high for some operations. If you can afford the equipment though, having that ability to mix all the ingredients together and formulate a balance ration can lead to improved feed efficiency of the calves.

Information comes from K-State University Beef Cattle Institute veterinarians, Dr. Phillip Lancaster, and Dr. Bob Larson.

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