



## Transitioning Calves to a New Milk Replacer Program

Transitioning to or starting calves on a new ration is a big decision. Once the decision is made, making the switch to a new product or program requires planning to reduce stress and the chance for health issues or refusals.

### Customized Programs to Fit Your Needs

Feeding programs can be customized to fit your objectives, economic plan, and labor arrangements. When choosing a feeding program, begin first with your expectation of calf performance. Then ask questions related to economics and labor. Chances are there is a feeding program available that strikes a balance between all variables.

Below are some questions to ask:

- How much do I want calves to gain per day or prior to weaning?
- When do I need to wean my calves?
- What do I want my calves to look like at weaning?
- What labor arrangements do I have that could change the kind of program that can be implemented?
- What is my feeding and management program like after weaning?
- Do I want to encourage early starter feed consumption or provide more of the nutrients required for growth from milk replacer?
- What effect on calf health will this program have when implemented correctly?

Answering these questions will hopefully narrow your search for a program that meets your needs. Refer to **FrontLine® T001.63** for more information about choosing the right milk replacer product for your needs.

### Why Do I Need to Gradually Transition to a New Feeding Program?

The stress of a sudden change could have a negative impact on calf health. Calves may also refuse to consume a product if it is different than what they're accustomed to.

#### Some common changes include:

- Liquid feed type: whole milk to milk replacer or vice versa
- Mixing at variable solids rates, either by plan or by chance
- Nutrient composition: higher or lower fat and/or protein levels
- Increases or decreases in the total percent solids of the solution
- Protein type, especially from an all-milk or plasma protein product to a vegetable protein milk replacer
- From a medicated product to non-medicated or different medication type
- The inclusion of additives in the ration that have an odor or flavor.

### How Do I Transition to a New Product?

- Gradual transitions reduce stress and help prevent nutritional scours. Two effective transition methods include blending both the new and existing products or starting fresh with new calves. Blending products means as it implies- blend your current product with the existing one for a



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period of a few days, up to a week. Begin by mixing 75%:25%, existing to new; then 50%:50% over a few days, and finally 25%:75% before switching to 100% new product. Another method is to feed the existing group of older calves the same product to weaning. Start all new calves on the new feeding program. What about "step-up" programs? If you want calves to receive more nutrients as they get older it is beneficial to keep the mixing rate the same and gradually feed more total volume of solution.

### Tips to Manage Transitions

- Be sure you know how to mix and feed the products correctly.
- Do not switch from an all-milk protein milk replacer to an alternative protein product without considering how the product and calf performance will change.
- Do not switch from a medicated to a non-medicated product without consideration to changes in your feeding or calf health and management program.
- Follow up and compare to be sure the changes you've made have had a positive impact on your operation.