

AUTOMATIC CALF FEEDERS

BUILD A NUTRITION PLAN IN 4 STEPS

Your success with automatic calf feeders relies on many components – one of the most critical is nutrition. Putting careful thought into your nutrition program up front will help maximize your investment long-term.

Follow these four steps to build a dairy calf nutrition plan for automatic calf feeders:

Step 1: Choose a dairy calf nutrition plan



RESTRICTED UNLIMITED

There are two main types of nutrition plans for automatic calf feeders: restricted and unlimited.

Restricted systems allow you to set the total volume per calf per day and the maximum amount each calf can drink in one feeding. If a calf doesn't drink its full allotment at a given meal, it can drink more at the next meal until it consumes the maximum total daily volume.

Unlimited systems allow calves to drink as much as they want. Calves are only limited by a maximum amount per meal to prevent over-drinking a meal. Unlimited systems allow dairy calves to drink what comes naturally and helps maximize intake for better growth rates.

Whether you choose a restricted or unlimited system, ensure calves are consuming 8-12 liters or more of milk or calf milk replacer per day. Be sure to pick a milk replacer designed for this feeding level.

Step 2: Set meal allowance



A common myth with automatic calf feeders is calves should drink several meals per day, but that's not always the case. Automatic calf feeders allow calves to have a more natural consumption pattern, which usually means fewer, larger meals, especially as they get older.

Allow calves to drink 2–3 liters per feeding to help maximize intakes and improve growth. Smaller meal sizes can leave dairy calves hungry and cause them to gather around the feeders, preventing other calves from drinking.

Step 3: Adjust solids levels

GOAL:
12–15%
SOLIDS

Automatic calf feeders allow for precise mixing of calf milk replacer by automatically adding a pre-selected amount of powder per liter of water. However, it's up to you to

program the machine to deliver the correct quantities. Routinely calibrate the feeder to assure proper delivery.

The ideal solids level for automatic calf feeders is 140-180 grams of powder per liter or 12-15 percent solids. Lower solids levels force calves to drink a high volume of liquid to achieve the same amount of dry matter intake.

Check the calibration of automatic calf feeders once a week, or whenever a new batch of powder is added, to ensure accurate solids levels.

Step 4: Monitor starter intakes



With automatic calf feeders, it's critical to monitor calf starter feed intake. It can be a challenge to determine exactly how much starter to feed compared to individually fed dairy calves. Not enough starter can cause competition issues, but too much calf starter feed can lead to waste.

Provide the minimum amount of starter needed so the bunk is nearly clean at the end of the day or half day depending on how often you feed. Gradually increase calf starter feed amounts as calves grow to prepare for weaning. Calves should be eating at least 3 pounds of starter per day before beginning the weaning process.

Land O'Lakes Animal Milk Products can help you get the best nutrition for your calves with a team of experts and more than 10 years of research with automatic calf feeders.

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LET'S TALK!

Contact your local [automatic calf feeder specialist](#) today to implement a management

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