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There are many things to consider in selecting your first calf. The first question you must answer is, "What breed will I select?" This is a most important decision to make. The breed selected will be important to the future of the project. Some points to consider in breed selection are: (1) the breed on your farm is usually the best choice; (2) the breed that is most popular in the community is usually the one that has proven most profitable for the area; and (3) the choice or the breed is liked best should be taken seriously after one has studied and learned about the breeds.

The next question often asked is, "What age animal should I select?" It is generally best for a young club member to start out with a young calf, about 6 months old. Calves of this age are usually easier to raise, and have already gone through the most expensive feeding period.

The important thing is to start with a good type calf. You will find that a calf with good type, and backed by an inheritance of high production, will stimulate your interest, enthusiasm, and lead to success. A mediocre or poor calf will often lead to discouragement and failure. Of course, cost will be a factor, but try to get the very best calf you can afford. A good one is the cheapest in the long run.

The calf's date of birth is of great importance. You should always keep this in mind when selecting your animal. The base dates for showing are January 1 and July 1. Consequently, an animal born in January or February, or in July or August will usually have the advantage in the shows. Always try to avoid buying an animal born in May, June, November, or December.

Junior shows in Oklahoma require that your animal be registered in your name. The transfer of ownership must be recorded in the breed association office before the beginning date of the show.

In buying a dairy heifer, you should base your choice mainly on the same things a breeder uses to build his herd. A good dairyman keeps the calves from the high-producing and good type cows. To do this, he must evaluate the pedigree of an animal before he buys it. You may need help to do this evaluating. Ask your agent or 4-H dairy leader to help you find the right kind of animal.

## Selecting Your First Dairy Heifer

Careful selection of your calf is only a start because a good pedigree alone does not guarantee high production or show ring winnings. Unless you give your calf the proper growth and development from birth to maturity, you will lose many of the benefits expected from good breeding and selection.

### Feeding Your Calf

Your calf requires help to become a good cow. The kind of help it needs is plenty of proper feed and care.

Your calf needs its mother's milk the first three days. This milk is called colostrum, and it protects the calf against infection.

**Drinking.** You can teach your calf to drink early from a nursing bottle, nipple pail, or open pail. It is easy to teach the calf to suck the nipple, but which ever method you choose will require giving the bottle, nipple, and bucket a good scrubbing after each feeding.

**Feeding.** You should warm the milk to body temperature (about 100 degrees F) before feeding. Be sure to weigh or measure the amount of milk at each feeding. A good rule is one pound (pint) of milk for each ten pounds of the calf's body weight divided into two daily feedings. Feed at the same time each day. To guide you in knowing how much milk to feed your calf, learn the average birth weights of calves by breeds.

Avoid changes in amounts or temperature of the milk, and be sure to change from the mother's milk to milk replacer. Avoid overfeeding; if the calf becomes sick, reduce the amount of milk fed.

No single method of feeding will fit all conditions. Your parents, local leader, and agent can help you select the best method.

If you buy a calf that someone else has started on feed, be sure to find out how much and what kind of feed it has been getting. Try to use the same kind of feed for a while. If you do have to change, do it gradually.

**Hay.** Pick the best quality hay for your calf. Look for hay with green color, fine stems, and many leaves. It is more important to have good hay than to worry about the kind. Start feeding hay when your calf is 1 week old. Feed the hay in a rack, and use fresh hay each day; remove the leftover hay before adding a new supply.

**Water.** Keep plenty of clean, fresh water before your calf at all times. Clean the water pail daily.

**Minerals.** Provide trace-mineralized salt for your calf at all times. Keep the salt box out of the weather.

## Managing Your Calf

**Individual Pens.** Calves raised separately do best. Get an adult to help you make an individual calf pen. This pen will keep calves from sucking each other.

**Identification.** Positively identify your calf with a neck strap, eartag, or tattoo. Record the date of birth along with this identification.

**Eartag.** If you use the eartag, record the tag number, the name of the sire and dam, and the calf's date of birth in a record book.

**Neck Strap.** A neck strap can be leather, plastic, or chain with a number for temporarily marking calves.

**Tattoo.** The tattoo is one of the most popular methods of identifying calves, and one of the best. The tattoo is a permanent mark that will always positively identify the calf. The solid color breeds, such as Jersey and Brown Swiss, especially prefer this method. Guerneys will now accept the tattoo as positive identification.

For the broken color breeds, such as Holstein or Ayrshire, you may sketch or photograph. Be sure, however, that you have positive identification, such as an eartag or neck strap, until this is done.