

## Prepared for Weaning?

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*There are many decisions for farmers to consider regarding the weaning process! Preparing calves properly for the next phase of their life requires careful planning, a clear objective and timely management. Please allow me to review key steps leading up to weaning and share some main points of consideration ahead of weaning.*

### **Key Steps for the Calves:**

- Born alive and received adequate quality and quantity of colostrum to build maternal immunity
- Processed close to birth perhaps receiving: identification, navel Iodine, castration, vaccination and vitamin supplementation
- Vaccinated at 2-3 months of age to help build initial immunity towards targeted diseases.
- Parasites and flies were controlled
- Body condition scored the cow herd as the calves entered the nutritional gap phase of the lactation curve
- Supplied a quality mineral supplement
- Forage levels were monitored for quality and quantity
- Provided supplemental nutrition if needed: creep feed, harvested forage or reducing cattle numbers through weaning or culling
- Bulls are pulled to keep a tight calving window next year and to ensure the heifer calves remain open

### **Main Points to consider ahead of weaning:**

- **Precondition Program-** Preconditioning combines consulting your veterinarian to build a health program for the calves and working with a nutritionist to develop a detailed weaning diet. As mentioned above, this program starts long before weaning day and has many parts. Once a successful program is established it will only need to be adjusted slightly in subsequent years. Caring for the calves for 45-60 days before sale offers the best long term health, performance rewards and higher demand at market.
- **Lessen stress-** Change as few things as possible on weaning day. Keep feed and facilities as similar as possible for the cows and calves. Consider an alternative weaning process like, fence line weaning, for the first 5-7 days to allow the cows and calves a chance to ease into being apart. If cattle are handled at the time of weaning use low stress handling procedures.

- **Monitor-** Keep a close eye on the cows and calves for the first 14-21 days past weaning. Clear evidence of water and feed consumption is imperative. This is often the time when sickness or injury can result in both cows and calves.
- **Record-** Keep a list of results to allow for a weaning time review. Small modifications from year to year can lead to big results in success in the future.

*Weaning time brings the finality of many management decisions together at once. Careful planning and seeking the help of trusted professionals can lead to a successful outcome. There are many weaning techniques that work, but keeping attention to the details is important! Have a safe and successful weaning and harvest season!*

The WI Beef Information Center, [fyi.extension.wisc.edu/wbic/cowcalf/](http://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/wbic/cowcalf/), has a useful Pre-Conditioning Factsheet available that speaks to many points of beef calf health and management through the weaning timeframe.

Resources:

UNL: G2057 Management, Health, and Nutritional Considerations for Weaning Calves  
Karla H. Jenkins, Dee Griffin, and L. Aaron Stalker