

Growing Faster pre-weaning

How can we grow our calves faster before weaning?

First we must consider what our targets might be. Here are examples of industry standards for use in setting targets –

Adjusted Weaning weights (to 1 st March)	NZ or English Red	Eastern European	Wapiti or Elk X
Males (kg)	60	65	70
Females (kg)	55	60	67



What factors should we consider to maximise growth?

Lactation facts

The calf demand drives hind lactation.

- * Lactation peaks at approximately 2.8 l/d at 1 to 2 months with a production of 1.6 l/d in March.
- * The hind has the potential to increase milk yield by 30%, by increasing intake by 6 to 8 MJME/d, if demand is there.

Energy intake is key.

- * The hind can increase her dry matter intake to meet the demands for lactation if feed quality declines.
- * The hind/calf pair will need between 45 and 60 MJME/d during lactation to maximise calf growth and maintain hind condition.

Amount of feed impacts on the hind first.

- * The hind begins to lose weight when feed on offer declines below 1800 kg DM/ha.

Protein intake is less important.

- * The hind can still provide good lactation even at protein concentrations of 12%.

Forage intake interacts with feed quality.

- * The hind will decrease her dry matter intake if the demand for milk declines due to an increase in forage intake by the calf.
- * The hind may not be able to compensate with some forages, especially when the amount on offer declines.
- * Calf liveweight gain may decline if forage quality is below 10 MJME/kg DM (lower by 100 g/d/MJME).

What do I need to know to improve my weaning weight?

Triggers - signposts to check to see if you are on track or if you need to change.

- * **Hind BCS at set stocking**
- * **Estimated calving date**
- * **Pasture quality 15 January**
- * **Hind BCS 15 January**
- * **Pasture cover 15 January**

What actions should we consider to optimize weaning weight?

- * Allow 4 to 5 kg DM/hind/d of high quality feed for hinds with red calves at foot. Hinds with Wapiti calves should be allowed an additional 1-1.5 kg DM/d.
- * Aim for pasture covers of 1800+ kg DM/ha for lactating hinds.
- * Incorporating highly palatable species (e.g. forage herbs, etc) in late lactation (February) will encourage calves to increase intake (and hence growth rates), and assist in development of rumen function which will minimise setbacks at weaning.
- * Where high quality pasture is available to support weaner growth, pre-rut weaning and controlled feeding of calves is recommended.
- * If high quality pasture is not available, better calf performance may be obtained from post-rut weaning. However, if this results in lower hind condition during mating, it may result in later calving and possibly lower conception rates.
- * Introduce hinds and calves to new feeds before weaning so that calves will make the most of it after weaning.
- * Consider supplementation if feed supply is poor.