

FEEDING NURSE DAIRY COWS

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It has become relatively common for individual dairy cows to be purchased for personal consumption or being acquired to feed orphan and excess calves. While the dairy and beef cow are both bovines, it is important to consider the significantly different nutritional needs of dairy cows in comparison. Too often, the 'nurse cow' is thrown in with the beef cows and expected to feed 2,3 or even 4 calves on the same ration as the rest of the herd. This is not the case.

Most beef cows can be expected to produce about 10-12L of milk, which is what a calf typically requires daily. Lactating beef cows require around 12% protein in their ration, with anywhere from 0-8 pounds of grain/cow/day added to their ration during early lactation prior to grass, though most receive none. Dry matter intake of these animals is around 30 pounds/cow/day.

In order for a dairy cow to produce 30-40 L of milk daily they need around 16.5% protein in their ration, require 16-20 pounds of grain/cow/day and have a dry matter intake of 55-60 pounds per cow per day.

As you can see, we cannot expect a dairy cow to survive, feed multiple calves AND get pregnant while being fed a beef cow ration.

In order to provide these cows what they need, and allow your calves the ability to grow to their full potential, it is probably prudent to house and feed them separately.

If you are considering acquiring a dairy cow, I would highly suggest you speak to a nutritionist and I would personally like to thank Mr. Barry Robinson for his input on this article.

