

Dairy calf workshop highlights nutrition and development opportunities

AT A GLANCE

Through the collaboration of academics, producers and allied industry, this workshop provides knowledge for dairy producers to remain sustainable in their calf-raising enterprise.

The Situation

For 23 of the past 24 years, Idaho livestock cash receipts have surpassed crop cash receipts. Cattle and calves and dairy (milk) are the largest two revenue generators in the livestock category.

The U.S. beef cattle herd is at a record low, due to multiyear drought and high input costs. Consumer beef demand, however, has remained strong even as prices hit record highs. Dairy producers have strategically implemented management strategies (genomics and sex-sorted semen) to generate replacement dairy heifer calves and beef x dairy calves. Consequently, the value of calves, both dairy heifers and beef x dairy, has skyrocketed.

Our Response

Research and Extension faculty from the University of Idaho collaborated to address optimizing calf nutrition management strategies in an educational workshop during fall 2025.

The objective was to educate stakeholders and clientele on optimizing calf milk-phase nutrition from colostrum administration through weaning. Topics presented covered 1) calf anatomy and physiology of the digestive system 2) appropriate colostrum feeding



Dairy calf nutrition workshop participants in Jerome.

including quantity, quality and frequency 3) volume and frequency of milk and milk replacer to meet development goals 4) weaning strategies and 5) new calf nutrition research summaries.

A panel discussion, where experts from the University of Idaho and the Idaho dairy industry answered questions, provided ample opportunity for interaction on a wide range of calf nutrition and development topics.

Program Outcomes

Attendance at the workshop held in Jerome was 26 participants. The demographic split between attendees consisted of dairy producers (38%), allied industry, including nutritionists (19%), veterinarians (4%), university educators (31%) and graduate students (8%). The

total number of calves on milk managed by attendees was greater than 40,000.

Voluntary pre- and post-tests were administered to assess the level of knowledge gained by participants. At the beginning of the workshop, participants were asked to answer multiple choice questions related to topics to be presented. The same questions were asked at the end of the workshop. According to the pre- and post-tests of knowledge, the educational materials and delivery methods (presentations and panel discussion) increased the knowledge level of attendees by 5.8 percentage points.

Participants were given the opportunity to evaluate the workshop. The evaluation asked whether a participant had gained knowledge in any of the topics presented. Responses were unanimous as 100% remarked “yes.” When asked if they would likely adopt one or more of the practices discussed, 70% of dairy producers remarked “yes.”

The evaluation also asked how many people you might share an aspect of this workshop with in the next 12 months. The range in responses was 2 to 200 people (face-to-face) with one respondent stating 1,500 people (through social media).

Qualitative statements regarding workshop evaluation referred to the participants’ satisfaction with the structure and content, discussion panel and overall group interaction. Overall, the dairy calf nutrition workshop did not receive any negative comments from participants.

The Future

Another workshop, in early 2026, covering the same topics and including a panel discussion, will be held in central Washington. Two additional workshops with new information gleaned from our research on weaning pace and probiotic supplementation, are scheduled for late 2026 and early 2027 in Idaho and Washington.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Joseph C. Dalton, Professor and Extension Dairy Specialist • University of Idaho Animal, Veterinary and Food Sciences • 208-454-7633 • jdalton@uidaho.edu

Denise Konetchy, Associate Professor • University of Idaho Animal, Veterinary and Food Sciences • 208-885-7390 • konetchy@uidaho.edu

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