

June 13, 2012

### **Is it Time to Consider Early Weaning?**

[Dr. Thomas B. Turner](#), Emeritus, Department of Animal Sciences, The Ohio State University  
(originally published here in June, 2005)

---

For most beef producers with spring calving cow herds, summer is a time to focus on other things. It seems like the one season of the year when we can reduce the hours per week spent with the beef enterprise. Things appear to be okay and they probably are "okay" but are there potential profits being lost? Consider the following:

- Beef cow lactation peaks at about six weeks post calving and continues to decline.
- July and August pasture growth and moisture are generally limited.
- The number of cows most beef producers keep is a function of how many can be carried in July and August.
- Dry cows consume significantly less feed than lactating cows. Some studies would suggest as much as fifty percent less, or the difference between 4% of their body weight on a dry matter basis during lactation versus only 2% when dry.
- The combination of reduced milk production, decreased pasture and increased calf size may (and probably does) result in calves not receiving adequate energy to maximize growth during this most efficient growth period of their life.
- Calves nursing cows are not efficient in converting creep feed to gain. Most studies would show that it takes 8-10 pounds of creep feed to make one pound of gain.
- Early weaned calves will convert feed to gain at about a 3.5 to 1 ratio.
- Early weaned calves will weigh about 100 pounds more at normal weaning time than calves left on the cow.
- Calves can be successfully and relatively easily weaned from 70 to 120 days of age and started on a grain diet.
- Calves averaging 100 days of age and 300 pounds take up very little barn or shed space.
- If retaining ownership, calves will reach harvest weight earlier and have a higher quality grade.
- Dry cows that have had their calves weaned early will enter the winter in better body condition.
- Calves born in February, March and early April can be weaned on or about July 1 - the typical start of dry, hot weather in most parts of the country.

In summary, early weaning can increase calf weight significantly and decrease cow input. Therefore one could carry more cows on the same land and wean heavier calves with a smaller amount of feed to the calves.