



Use of milk feeders and group housing in veal calves production



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Material and methods

The trial was conducted from June to November on **103 Friesian male calves**, housed in 3 groups of about 30 each, in 3 pens of 102 m² in the same stable, and reared from 33 to 175 d of age (average period 142 days) at slaughter.

In each pen, 2 automatic milk replacer dispensers, 8 m of linear manger for dried maize silage (as fiber feed) and 2 drinking troughs were available 24h per day.

The feeding plan provided increasing amounts of **milk replacer** (120-180 g/l of powder in 4-16 l/d of water) and **dried maize silage** (0,1-1 kg/d).

Aim

To test the possibility of **rearing veal calves** in **large groups** using **automatic calf feeders**, according the latest EU suggestion on cattle welfare.



Overall rearing results

| | mean | range |
|--|--------------|--------------------|
| Purchased calves (n) | 103 | |
| Slaughtered calves (n) | 75 | |
| Mortality rate (%) | 27.2 | |
| Starting age (d/head) | 33 | (14 ÷ 51) |
| Slaughtering age (d/head) | 175 | (153 ÷ 195) |
| Length of rearing period (d) | 142 | (137 ÷ 147) |
| Starting weight (kg/head) | 52.6 | (34 ÷ 72) |
| Final weight (kg/head) | 127.9 | (56 ÷ 205) |
| Weight gain (kg/head) | 75.1 | (8 ÷ 137) |
| Daily weight gain (kg/head/d) | 0.66 | (0.1 ÷ 1.2) |
| Hot dressing percentage (%) | 55.4 | (34 ÷ 82) |
| Milk consumption (kg/head) | 200.4 | |
| Silage consumption (kg/head) | 77.1 | |
| Feed consumption (kg/head/period) | 277.5 | |



Best performances

20 animals weighed at slaughter **>150 kg**
9 animals gaining **>1 kg/d**
17 carcasses weighted **>90 kg**
20 animals dressed **>57%**

Conclusion

While the overall results were not as good as expected, **several calves achieved good performances**, showing the feasibility to use automatic calf feeders for large groups of animals.