Effects of ad libitum milk intake on dairy calves.


In this research, the authors compared conventional milk feeding with feeding milk for ad libitum consumption from a nipple. Calves were weaned gradually between days 37 and 42 by diluting milk with water, and body weight and feed consumption were followed until day 63. It was found that calves fed ad libitum drank 89% more milk during the pre-weaning period but they ate only 16% as much calf starter and 17% as much hay. Before weaning, calves fed ad libitum gained 63% more weight than the conventionally fed calves but during and after weaning, the rate of weight gain slowed for both treatment groups. No differences were observed in weight gains over the weaning or post-weaning periods and at the end of the experiment, on day 63, the calves fed ad libitum conserved their advantage of body weight. There were no differences between the groups in measures of calf health. It was concluded that ad libitum nipple-feeding of milk to dairy calves can allow for increased milk intake and weight gain with no detrimental effects on intake of solid food after weaning.