

# Nutrition programme producing results

The Shaw family have been using the Queen of Calves nutrition programme for a number of years and have noticed a marked increase size and production when the heifers entered the herd. **Samantha Tennent** reports.

**W**AIKATO dairy farmers know what the difference is between rearing good calves and exceptional calves thanks to Queen of Calves.

When Wayne Shaw stopped using a calf nutrition programme for a couple of years, he noticed such a difference between those reared on the product and those not, he knew he had to bring it back.

Wayne and his wife Kate, who are equity partners in New Zealand's oldest registered Jersey Stud, Paterangi Jersey Stud south of Hamilton, have been using the Queen of Calves programme from Bell-Booth for the past 10 years.

Queen of Calves is a nutrition programme for calves that involves supplementing the daily milk with a scientifically balanced mix of plant extracts. The product generates faster lean skeletal growth in the calves' first 10 weeks of life so that the animals can be mated at 11 to 12 months.

After the Shaws started using it, they stopped for a couple of seasons because they thought there was little or no benefit. Although they had not measured or weighed the animals, visually, they could not see any difference at weaning.

It wasn't until 2010 when those heifers that had been reared on the product entered the herd they saw that it had made a difference – and quite a decent one too.

"We reviewed their performance when the heifers came into production," he says.

"It was a tough season and the herd was down 5% but the heifers were up 22% and that reversed the trend."

They combed through their records and the only significant difference they could



**Wayne and Kate Shaw are equity partners in the Paterangi Jersey Stud where they milk 510 cows.**

find was the use of Queen of Calves when they were young.

"That was the beginning of a change in farm policy that we now use. Every calf has been raised on Queen of Calves ever since."

Shaw says of that first batch of heifers, 12 cows remain in the herd.

"They're 12 years old now, and are starting to struggle with walking the greater distances but their production and reproduction are still great."

His heifers averaged 442kg MS last season. The New Zealand average Jersey production last year was 254kg MS.

A lot of care goes into the calves on their farm. They only collect calves in the morning but if it is a wet night, they take some warm colostrum when they check the herd and bottle feed any new calves.

They spray navels at night checks and continue to spray for three days after

“Our heifers are always huge. They're over 400kg by February so the growth is amazing.”

they calves are born to ensure they dry properly and stop any bugs causing problems.

From birth the calves are given X-factor probiotic from Bell-Booth and from day 19 they are fed Queen of Calves.

"You can see the transition instantly. Their poo changes as the Queen of Calves

slows the milk process going through the stomach and the calves get more energy out of it.”

Shaw explains there is an epigenetic change too.

“Animals raised on Queen of Calves are used to getting all the nutrients they need. When they’re older they are more aggressive foragers than other cattle.”

He sees this in the young herd that they graze separately during the season.

“They really deck the paddocks like the mixed-aged cows. Our newest staff member couldn’t believe it when she saw the grazed paddocks.”

The 140ha stud milks about 510 cows and is in its third season split calving with an autumn herd of 185. Their monster heifers allowed them to try something radical when setting up their autumn herd.

“Our heifers are always huge. They’re over 400kg by February so the growth is amazing.”

In fact their heifers are so big that when the shed builders measured cows to determine bale size for the new rotary shed that was recently installed, they had to go with the crossbreed size bale.

Being a split calving system, they decided to try mating them early, get them to calve over winter and get on the payroll early.

After research and being advised not to try it, they synchronised and mated their heifers at the end of June to calve mid-April the following year. Ninety-five animals were mated and 77 held.

The remaining heifers joined the spring herd.



**The Shaw’s heifers averaged 442kg MS last season. The New Zealand average Jersey production last year was 254kg MS.**



**The programme generates faster lean skeletal growth in the calves’ first 10 weeks of life and allows them to be mated sooner.**

He says that Queen of calves mothers give birth to bigger stronger offspring and produce better than others not raised on the product.

“They calve-down well and overall, have a better stature.”

He has found that their heifers are always 35-40 kilograms ahead of other Jersey mob and says he is stoked with the

how the animals look, perform and the gains he is seeing.

Shaw says that the programme has also had an impact on their breeding results.

“Using Queen of Calves has contributed greatly to our reproductive success,” he says.

“Our results are outstanding and we can boast a 77% three-week in-calf rate and 92% six-week in-calf rate, well above the industry target of 78%. I am really proud of our mating results and the team’s efforts.”

They have specific breeding goals and focus on production, capacity and udders. They value animals with good production and longevity.

The herd is individually sire matched and his father, Ray, DIY inseminates. They use a mix of semen from different companies, depending which bulls meet their criteria.

He really is impressed with the product and highly recommends it to other farmers.

“I wouldn’t take it out of our system, even in the low payout, I knew it would’ve still been contributing to our bottom line.”

“I truly believe what we are doing can be achieved by anyone and other farmers should look into Queen of Calves.”