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Producer Spotlight

Who: Don Bennink, owner
Mohamed ElSheikh, feed manager

What: North Florida Holsteins

Where: Bell, FL

North Florida Holsteins in Bell, Florida is a national leader in the dairy industry, known for genetically superior cows and the high level of comfort experienced by the cows. The operation is home to more than 10,000 head – 4,700 lactating cows, more than 4,300 replacements, and 1,100 bulls.

It's also home to innovation, most recently in the calf operation. These changes are leading to positive results that are set to generate future profits when the replacements enter the lactating herd.

Don Bennink, owner of North Florida Holsteins, has brought many innovative ideas to the table himself but also has allowed his employees to develop creative new solutions. Although Mohamed ElSheikh is the farm's feed department manager, when there were challenges in the calf operation, Don wanted to see whether Mohamed could turn things around. Mohamed came up with a unique way to feed calves that has promoted health and growth with exceptional results.

Calf rearing: Innovative change, positive returns



Employees of North Florida Holsteins with owner Don Bennink (rear left) and feed manager Mohamed ElSheikh (front).

Mohamed designed the calf feeding system to maximize milk intake and get the calves growing fast. Calves that are growing and eating generally don't have a lot of health issues. He built a system to feed calves free choice milk from day 1 to day 12. The system is a continuous

flow system that agitates constantly to keep the milk in solution and keep it warm.



Free choice continuous flow system used to feed calves milk replacer during the first 12 days.

The system feeds milk replacer mixed and kept in a small heated building so the milk can be kept warm. For the first 12 days, calves are housed in groups of 12 in a pen that includes a homemade feeder with five nipples to nurse from. During this period, feeding is ad libitum with no limit on intake.



Calves 1-12 days of age on the free choice system.

On day 13, the calves move into groups of 55 to begin feeding from a computerized feeder. One feeder can supply four stations that service 110 calves. From day 13 to day 40, the calves receive 12 liters of milk that can be consumed 12 times per day. On days 41-48, they are limited

to 6 liters that can be consumed 12 times per day, and on days 49-53, they can consume 2 liters during six feedings per day.



Calves on computer feeders from day 13 to day 53.

When the calves start the weaning phase at day 49, they are consuming 3-4 lbs. of calf starter per day. At weaning on day 53, they are consuming 7 lbs. of calf starter per day.

Using this program, North Florida Holsteins is getting the following results:

- Birth weight – doubled by day 38
- Mortality rate – 1.8%
- Morbidity rate – 12%
- Average daily gain – 2.4 lbs.

Also, the new feeding system is more labor efficient with four employees less than the previous system. Now there is one employee per 120 calves for ad-lib feeding and one employee per 220 calves for computerized feeding.

North Florida Holsteins uses Diamond V SmartCare® in the milk and Original XPC™ in the calf starter.

“The Diamond V Calf Program is doing two things for us,” Mohamed says. “First, it provides important support for calf health, which has improved from our previous system. Second, it is playing a big role in helping us to have the gains of 2.4 lbs. per day we are achieving.”

Learn more about [North Florida Holsteins](#).



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