

Auto Feeder Key Points for Success

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As more and more farms look for ways to manage with reduced labor and at the same time improve calf and heifer gains, auto feeders are gaining significant ground. In addition to shifting labor resources from being 'housekeepers' to 'calf managers' we are seeing a significant improvement in the nutrition being offered to young animals.

There are some challenges though. Unfortunately, it is not as easy as putting a unit in and 'visiting' the calves once a day. Miracles also don't happen by using large quantities of a good milk replacer or pasteurized milk product. Our biggest hurdle is still cleanliness and maintenance with these units.

The below set of guidelines are what I consider 'must do' to maximize your rate of gain and maintain health in calves fed with an auto feeder. These guidelines are geared toward the Forster Technic units, but can be extrapolated to a variety of systems. The basic principles are the same.

Auto Feeder Tasks

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Use a detergent that is made for low temperature cleaning.

DAILY:

1. Replace and clean nipples with soap/water and a nipple brush.
2. Using a brush, clean entire nipple unit including drain area.
3. Using a brush, clean out mixer. Make sure the sensor in the mixer is clean.
4. Make sure milk replacer hopper outlet is clean. If there is residue: unscrew the black knob, pull the metal lip off and clean with a brush, soap, and water. Dry the metal piece completely, then reinstall.
5. Make sure water outlet is clean and free from residue.
6. Do a circuit cleaning.
7. Do a sponge cleaning.

WEEKLY:

1. Replace and discard hoses from unit to nipples.

QUARTERLY or when new pallet of milk replacer arrives:

1. Calibrate.

SEMI-ANNUALLY:

2. Replace drain hose that comes out of the mixer.

STANDARD SETTINGS:

1. Feed temperature for mixing: 42°C
2. Mixer cleaning: 3 to 4 times per day (make sure this doesn't occur during peak feeding times)
3. Mixer emptying: 5 minutes
4. Mixer off delay: 6 seconds
5. Draining time, feed station: 60 seconds
6. Cleaning temperature: Set to product recommendations.