

Effect of time of feeding on time of calving



Basil Lowman, beef specialist, Scotland's Rural College

Changing the time of feeding has been shown to have an effect on the time of day cows will calve. In a trial on four commercial spring-calving farms:

- Feeding the daily roughage allowance as normal in the morning resulted in 43% of cows calving at night
- Moving to late evening feeding, around 10 pm, reduced the number of cows calving at night to 21%, with the peak time for calving occurring between 6 and 8 am.

On a practical level, this may be achieved by laying out the food during 'normal' working hours, e.g. 5pm, but keeping the cows away from the food with a gate. When the stockperson goes out to check the cows before bed, e.g. at 10 pm, the gate is opened and the cows are allowed to feed.

After eating, cows will lie down to ruminate and digest their feed for several hours. This may act to delay calving and increase the likelihood of calving occurring during 'normal' working hours. Fewer night calvings means a more rested stockperson to attend to calvings during the day. Generally extra staff are available during the daytime to assist.

Day time				Night time	
6am			6pm		
9am feed					
					
57% calving's			43% calvings		
Day time				Night time	
6am			6pm		
Peak calving's between 6-8am			10pm feed		
					
79% calvings			21% calvings		

Further advice on minimising calving difficulties can be found in the BRP+ document [Minimising calving difficulties](#)