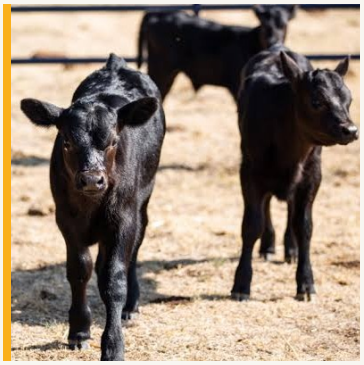
Healthy weaners start with less stress

With weaning season under way across the district, FarmCo Moora has some timely advice on keeping calves healthy through one of the toughest weeks of their lives.

By **Amanda Walker**, FarmCo Moora



Weaning is stressful. For a young calf, being separated from its mother, yarded, handled and switched to a new diet all at once is a big shock to the system, and that stress weakens the immune system right when disease pressure is at its highest. **The secret to healthy weaners is simple: reduce all stress.**

Keep stress down

That starts with having **feed and water ready in the yards before the first calf is drafted off its mother**, and quality feed from day one, because hay alone is not enough for young calves. Penning calves by size and paddock of origin, in groups under 100 head, stops bigger calves bullying smaller ones off the trough. Shade, clean water, dust control and quiet daily handling all help. So does keeping the dogs well away.

Watch for coccidiosis

Stress also opens the door to coccidiosis, the disease that catches many producers out. Coccidia live in the gut, and when a calf's immunity drops their numbers explode, damaging the intestine. The tell-tale sign is **bloody or black scours, usually three to five weeks after weaning**, long after the calves seem to have settled. Severe cases lose weight fast and can die, and badly affected calves often end up as permanent poor doers.

Prevention is far cheaper than cure. **Nutritious feed from weaning day, with no breaks in supply,** is the best defence, backed by Rumensin® (monensin) in the ration at about 25 mg/head/day. Dry yards with shade and clean water, troughs cattle can't walk through, and rotating weaning yards or using small grassed enclosures instead of bare dirt all lower the risk. Rumensin needs careful handling, as overdosing is toxic and **even small amounts can kill horses**. Severe or chronic cases can be treated individually with Scourban®.

Vaccinate for protection

Vaccination is the next line of defence. Clostridial vaccine (5-in-1 or 7-in-1) is the foundation, and **two doses are needed for protection**. Calves that missed their first shot at marking should be vaccinated the day they enter the yards, as pulpy kidney is the big risk once weaners hit grain or lush feed. A vaccine against bovine respiratory disease is worth considering too, given dust, mixing and transport all raise the risk. No more than two vaccines should be given at once.

Test before you drench

Then there are worms. Most weaners carry them. Ill thrift, rough coats, condition loss and green scours are the obvious signs, but poor weight gain on its own can point to a hidden burden. Rather than guess, **a worm egg count (WEC) test shows whether a drench is needed**, and a second count 14 days after drenching confirms the drench actually worked, which matters more than ever with drench resistance on the rise. Weaners should then go onto spelled paddocks and be checked regularly for lice.

FarmCo Moora: your weaning partner

For all your cattle weaning needs, talk to the team at FarmCo Moora. FarmCo stocks clostridial and respiratory vaccines, drenches, lice treatments, Rumensin, Scourban, trace mineral injections, vaccinators, troughs and feeders, along with the local advice to put it all together. **FarmCo Moora also carries out WEC tests onsite.** Drop in fresh dung samples before weaning to take the guesswork out of drenching and protect the drenches that work on your property.

Plan this season's weaning with FarmCo Moora

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Always read and follow product labels, including withholding periods. For a herd-specific health program, talk to your veterinarian.