

# The Stress of Weaning for the Calf

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With more pedigree Hereford Breeders' moving from Autumn to Spring calving, the following article may be of interest. Here SAC's Basil Lowman points out some of the fundamental differences and pitfalls between the two seasonal calving periods.

At weaning, many facets of the calf's life change. All of these contribute to its behaviour and the stress it undergoes. Nutritionally not only does the calf lose its mothers milk but



also its agitation significantly reduces its intake of dry feed be it grass, silage or concentrates. Perhaps most importantly the stress compromises the calf's ability to combat disease (immuno suppression), often seen by its much greater susceptibility to pneumonia.

Some of the major changes for the calf are listed in the following table with an indication of how important they are for Spring born calves weaned at housing compared with Autumn born calves weaned at an older age at grass in mid-Summer.

## Weaning Stressors on the Calf

	Spring	Autumn
Loses contact with mother	✓	✓
Loss of milk	✓	
Change of roughage, e.g. grass to silage	✓	
Change in concentrate intake, e.g. difficult to creep feed Autumn born calves pre weaning		✓
Change of environment, e.g. from outside to housed	✓	
Mixed with other stock	✓	✓
Coincides with other treatments, e.g. de-horning, castration,		?

The table shows the greater stresses weaning imposes on the Spring born calf in addition to the much younger age at which it is weaning. This makes it considerably more dependent on milk compared to a 10 month Autumn born calf.

