



NSW DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Growing heifers - Readers' Note

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<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/dairy-cattle/herd/manuals/growing-heifers>

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Contract rearing of dairy replacements

Introduction

Contract rearing of dairy replacements can be an attractive option if you are restricted by farm size and wish to milk more cows. You can free up valuable land, labour and feed resources. You are guaranteed predetermined growth rates, with heifers ready to calve at 2 years and big enough to maximise their genetic potential.

Payment

The suggested method of payment is for weight gain and is loaded to favour good early growth to the target live weight for high fertility at mating. Suggested target live weights are given in Table 4.1.

Suggested payments

Weaning to mating: \$1.00 per kg live weight gain.

Mating to pre-calving: \$1.10-\$1.20 per kg live weight gain.

Payment schedules will vary from rearer to rearer. Incentives may be paid for agreed growth rates during winter months when supplements are likely to be fed.

The average cost of rearing is \$6.00 a week, which includes payment for weight gain, health treatment, mating and weighing. Other costs would include transport and preparation of legal contacts.

An overall minimum cost from 4 months to 23 months would be \$530 per heifer.

Drawing up contracts

Before you enter into an arrangement it is important that you draw up a detailed contract with the rearer.

Some of the points that need to be included in this contract are:

- responsibility for
 - daily management
 - veterinary attention
 - mating and pregnancy testing
 - delivery and collection
- date for delivery and collection
- weighing procedure and frequency
- payment schedule and timing of payments
- penalties for not achieving the target weight
- disease assurance programs
- penalties for deaths and losses.

Both parties must receive an adequate financial return to justify a contract rearing arrangement. From the owner's viewpoint the return from running additional milking cows must more than cover the costs of contract rearing. The contract rearer is interested in the comparison between returns from contract rearing and alternative enterprises.

Table 4.1: Suggested target live weights

	Weaning(12 weeks)	Mating(15 mnths)	Pre-calving(23 mnths)*
Friesian	100 kg	350 kg	530 kg
Jersey	80 kg	280 kg	400 kg

* Heifers are returned to owner at 23 months to settle in to herd.

Other issues

Health and disease transfer

There is a potential for transferring disease on to the rearer's property or neighbouring farms if fences are not secure. All stock (including those owned by the rearer) should be tested negative or clear for EBL and Johne's disease. All bulls should be vaccinated for vibriosis.

Heifers should be vaccinated against the normal clostridial diseases and leptospirosis (give 7 in 1), as the latter can be transferred to humans.

Mating heifers for year-round calving herds

Under year-round calving there will be a need to mate a few heifers on a regular basis. For the rearer this means constantly juggling bulls or using an AI program, as a large number of heifers may be involved.

Problems with contract growing are likely to occur if the rearer and the owner do not fully understand the difficulties associated with heifer mating.