



**agriculture & rural development**  
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**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**  
**RESEARCH SUPPORT SERVICES**

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**FACTORS TO CONSIDER DURING CALF WEANING AND REPLACEMENT**  
**HEIFER SELECTION**




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## Why do we wean

- Timely weaning is important as it allows the cow to recover before the next calving season
- The gestating cows are able to dry off, recover and focus energy on their pregnancy
- Weaning when the calf is 7 to 8 month is ideal for both the calf and the cow.
- However several other factors can influence when you may choose to wean your calf crop.
- Factors influencing when to wean
- Availability to pasture
- Body condition of the cow
- Market price



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## Weaning methods


1. Traditional weaning involves moving calves to a new location where they cannot see, smell or hear their dams. However this method can be somewhat stressful to newly weaned calves especially if they are moved long distances to an unfamiliar area.
2. Another weaning method is fence line weaning. In this method Calves and dams are separated by cross fencing
3. Nose plates can be fitted on the calf for 7 to 14 days then the calves can be separated from the dams with no stress.
4. The calves can be exchanged with calves from another group. However, cross suckling can be a problem.

The steers and heifers are separated at the end of weaning.



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## Selection of replacement heifers

- It is best to select replacement heifers following weaning. Selection based on the following;
  1. Early-born heifers. Heavier at weaning and greater chance of becoming pregnant earlier than later-born herd mates.
  2. Cull female twins to male calves because they are infertile.
  3. Evaluate growth performance and milk production from birth to weaning
  4. Visual phenotype to improve structure, conformation, and visual appearance. Select against cows with visual hereditary defects.
  5. Evaluate dam performance (calving ease, mothering ability)
  6. Cull calves with index of below 90 or above 120.



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The slide has a white background with a green triangle in the top-left corner. The text 'RE A LEBOGA!' is centered in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The footer contains the same logos and text as the first slide, including the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development logo, the slogan 'Let's grow North West together', the website 'www.nwpg.gov.za', and the NDP 2019 logo.