



# Don't let "good enough" reproduction limit your calf revenue

Milk prices have softened, but one revenue stream will continue to boom for at least two more years: beef-on-dairy calves. Dairies are capturing \$2-4/CWT of milk equivalent attributed to calf sales, helping offset lower milk margins. The question every dairy should ask today:

## HOW MANY CALF-SALE OPPORTUNITIES ARE WE MISSING BECAUSE REPRODUCTION ISN'T FULLY OPTIMIZED?

The MilkSmart simulation graph to the right helps visualize this opportunity. Every **↑1%** pregnancy rate and **↓2%** pregnancy loss results in approximately **+25 calves/year** for a 1000-cow dairy.



↑ 3%-unit pregnancy rate & ↓ 6%-unit pregnancy loss:  
**+74 calves**  
**+\$0.26/cow/d revenue**

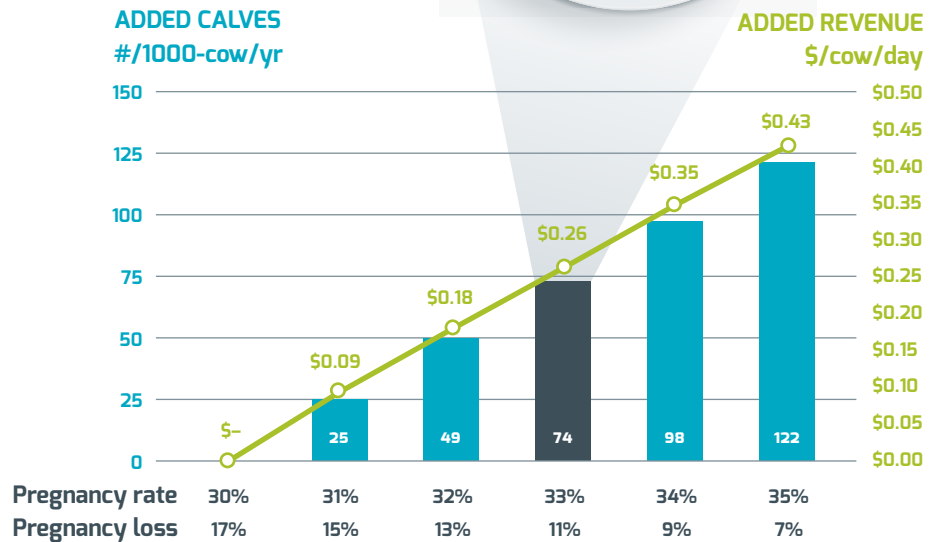


Figure. Effect of improving pregnancy rate and reducing pregnancy loss on number of calves born and gross revenue. Net income can be calculated by subtracting strategy cost from gross revenue.

Reproduction starts with cow health, and this is where identifying nutrient deficiencies can play a role in optimizing fertility. Methionine is one of these often-overlooked nutrients: across the US, most dairy diets are 15-25% deficient in methionine. Supplementation improves milk fat (~**0.12 lb/cow/d**), milk protein (~**0.1 lb/cow/d**), and overall cow health; benefits that already bring profitable returns. But today, the real hidden value with methionine supplementation is producing more calves.

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Cornell demonstrated that cows experiencing health challenges before the breeding phase have substantially worse fertility. But interestingly, supplementing these cows with methionine reduced the severity of health disorders, getting cows pregnant 24 days sooner. This translates approximately to **↑3%** pregnancy rate in dairies where half the cows experience sub-clinical and clinical diseases. Keeping that pregnancy is also key; in a controlled trial on a commercial dairy in WI, methionine reduced pregnancy losses from 16.7% to 10%. **The sooner cows get pregnant, the greater the opportunity for calf sales.** In today's market, every additional calf matters. A **↑3%** pregnancy rate combined with a **↓6%** pregnancy loss means **+74 calves/year** in a 1000-cow herd. This represents **\$96,200** in additional calf revenue/year (**\$0.26/cow/day**) at \$1,300 average calf value (figure). Conservatively, if a dairy realizes only a third of these responses, it is still over \$32,000 in additional calf revenue/year. This is new revenue created purely through improved fertility driven by methionine supplementation.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Better health leads to better fertility, hence more pregnancies, more calves, and more income. Methionine supplementation is no longer just a strategy to capture more milk value. In today's beef-on-dairy market, it is also an important **calf-revenue strategy. Don't leave calf money on the table.**

## REFERENCES

Toledo et al. (2023); <https://doi.org/10.3168/jds.2022-21950>

Toledo et al. (2017); <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0189117>

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