

# A Canadian device is helping to relieve stress at weaning time for calves and mothers

A simple but effective bit of plastic produced by a Canadian company is beginning to make a name for itself in farming circles.

The ingenious creation clips onto a calf's nose to prevent it from suckling but reduces the young animal's stress by still being able to see and maintain physical contact with the mother.

It is claimed that the 'QuietWean' two-stage device dramatically cuts down the amount of bawling and walking, not only by the calves, but by the cows, during the weaning process. Gradually the cow-calf bond is broken over just a few days, while the pair is still together. The lightweight, non-invasive QuietWean nose tags are made from flexible plastic, making them easy to apply. The tags are typically left in for between four to seven days before separating the calves from their mothers.

As they are relatively new to the market in the UK, *Orkney Farmer's* owner, Ken Amer, decided to order a batch of the QuietWean nose tags and gave them out to a few local farmers to road test them, to see if they lived up to the claims made in the publicity material.

One of the farmers who has tried them out on some of his calves is Al Watson of Rennibister in Firth. He explained how easy they were to use.

"It wasn't too bad. We were obviously just trying it for the first time. We selected a group of 25 calves. We did half of them with the tags. The only thing is that normally we would just wean our calves straight off the coos and they'd go straight into the slats. With these tags, they have to be in for about a week. So we had to handle them through a crush to put the tags in and then do the same a week later to remove them. So there is a wee bit more work involved with it. But it certainly seemed to quiet the calves down. There was a wee bit o' shouting, but not too much. Half of them didn't have the tags in, so it was difficult – without spending a lot o' time pinpointing which calves

were actually making the noise. But it certainly was quieter. I went through the coos and calves at night, the first night they had the tags in. There would be a coo and a calf standing together, but they weren't shouting although the calf couldn't get a sook. The theory o' them did seem to pan out."

The nose tag system was brand new to Al Watson.

"I had never heard o' it until Ken phoned me up and wondered if I wanted to try it out. He sent me a link to their website and I had a look. They come from Canada where they're weaned into separate fields and they have miles o' ranch to work with. I think out there they say that the distance the calves walk when they don't have these tags in is 10-15 kilometres more than if they do have them. Out there, it is a huge scale and they're weaned either side o' a fence. They just walk up and down this fence. More likely in Orkney, we're weaning them here straight into a pen on the slats where they've only 20 feet by 10 to walk around."

Albeit it was a relatively small and brief trial, would he use the nose tag system again?

"I think so. If we had a crush set up the whole time, it actually didn't take long to do. But normally we have to spend an hour setting it up and taking it down. Anybody who had a permanent handling system set up it wouldn't be much hassle to them at all. We just happened to have a crush set up when Ken wanted to try them out. We have a head yoke which keeps the calf from moving about too much. We tried a few with it, and we actually found it was nearly easier without it. The calves pull back on the crush – you get a leg underneath the calf's nose and it just hooked on. It was quite simple to put on and quite simple to come off again. The 12 calves that had the tags in, had them in place for five days. One came out. They're in cubicle sheds. There are lots o' spars, feed troughs and silage that they're nosing about in. The one that came off, we found it in the feed

trough. It obviously just hooked in something among the silage. There was no damage done to the calf or the tag.

"In general, we noticed that the whole group o' calves that were weaned weren't shouting. It was only half of them that had the nose tags in. So whether because some o' them weren't shouting – the rest o' them weren't shouting either, I don't know. There was not that much noise came out o' them. It is four or five days since they were weaned, but the first couple of days there wasn't much noise at all. Usually, when you're weaning them, the calf is restless and will shout a lot. He's not eating like he should because he is stressed at being away from his mother, and obviously not getting the milk, it is a kind of sharp cut-off. With these nose tags, he is still with his mother so he is not quite so stressed. We found that the calves were eating away and were quite happy just two days after coming off their mothers. It is good for the mother as well because she is not looking for her calf, although she's not getting sooked. You can usually tell if there is something wrong with a calf. If a coo isn't being sooked, she goes looking for her calf and she will shout. But with this system the calf is still with her. She is getting used to not being sooked, but she is not stressed about it. It is probably the same benefit to the coo as it is to the calf. It's a win-win situation. Plus, the great thing about these nose tags is that you can use them again. You just need to wash them and soak them in disinfectant and they're ready for the next batch o' calves. They're hard plastic so they'll last for years, if you don't lose them."

QuietWean has a Facebook page at <http://www.quietwean.com> where you can watch a video of the calf nose tag system being used.

The company's main distributor in the UK is: Prutex Ltd, Beudy Bach, Dryslwyn, Carmarthenshire, SA32 8SF. Email: [info@prutex.co.uk](mailto:info@prutex.co.uk) or you can phone: 01558 668822.



Farmer Al Watson of Rennibister: attaching the nose tags to his calves



Two calves fitted with nose tags: eat their feed just like a calf without a tag.

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