

Creep watering attachment designed especially for calves

By [Barb Glen](#)

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Frostfree Nosepumps' creep watering attachment allows young or weak calves to access water from a trough that is filled by larger animals using the pump. | Frostfree Nosepumps Ltd. photo

Jeff Anderson says there is some debate about whether pre-weaned calves need supplemental water to complement their mother's milk.

Some producers believe it best for calves to get their entire liquid intake from milk because of its associated nutrients and immunological benefits.

Others believe calves should supplement milk intake with water as desired, especially if their dam has low milk supply or when summer temperatures are high.

"For the longest time, we muddled in that debate," said Anderson, head of sales and marketing with Frostfree Nosepumps Ltd. based in Rimbey, Alta.

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“We ultimately decided why should we get involved in that debate. Let’s offer an option so that regardless of what the producer’s philosophy is, we can cater to that.”

That’s when the company developed a creep watering attachment for the standard Frostfree Nosepump that allows calves to access free choice water at the pump site.

Frostfree Nosepumps, developed in 2002 by company founder Jim Anderson, allow animals to pump their own water year-round by pressing their noses against a mechanical piston pump that draws water from sources below the frost zone.

With the creep water attachment, a small amount of the water pumped by larger animals is diverted to a small line that feeds a trough.

Three 10-foot panels form a triangle around the trough, with one of them arranged for creep access by calves.

Anderson said the company is now on its third prototype for the calf waterer and is pleased with its result.

“This was feedback that we were getting from a certain cross section of prospective customers so that’s why we decided to go ahead and develop it,” he said.

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“Anything that we can do with our product to make it more appealing to a broader scope of producers is obviously going to benefit everyone.”

Calves learn to operate the nose pump as their mothers do, but one aspect of the Frostfree Nosepump is that the deeper the water source, the harder animals must push to pump water. That means younger or weaker calves may not be able to operate the pump until they reach a certain size, Anderson said.

The creep waterer addresses that issue.

“Ultimately our goal is to maximize production while minimizing inputs to create a more effective result from our livestock operation. If we’re ultimately shorting our calves a bit because our (water) source is too deep or their mother doesn’t have enough milk, then they’re not going to grow to their maximum potential and they’re not going to fetch maximum dollar at market.”

Anderson said the creep waterer is a fairly simple addition to existing Frostfree Nosepumps and once installed, it has no ongoing cost.

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However, because it is above ground, the creep attachment can only be used in above-zero temperatures.

Alberta Agriculture's farm water supply branch indicates calves in the 250 pound range require two gallons of water per day. If temperatures are 25 C or higher, three gallons per day are required.

Cows with calves need 12 gallons per day, or 18 on days above 25 C. Feeder cattle need four to 10 gallons daily depending on their size.