In the 1980s and 90s, when many calves were fed just 4 L of milk/d, a common recommendation was that forage not be provided because high intakes of forage could limit the starter intake that calves required for growth. Now that the benefits of feeding more milk are widely known, is it time to reassess forage feeding?

Calves were fed 8 L of milk/d and provided ad libitum access to either starter only or starter and grass hay. Solid feed intake was higher in calves that had access to forage; this difference was driven by the higher hay intakes of these calves.

From 11 wk of age, calves were provided ad libitum access to hay and limited to starter intakes of 2.5 kg/d. Hay intakes gradually increased among calves that had not had previous access to forage, but these intakes remained lower even at 18 wk of age.

To determine the effects of hay feeding before weaning, bull calves were slaughtered at 10 wks of age when the feeding treatments ended. Bull calves fed forage before weaning had larger rumens with higher pH, indicative of improved ruminal development.

Providing calves access to hay early during the milk feeding period increases intake of solid feed before weaning, promotes ruminal development and results in higher intakes of forage for at least several weeks after calves are weaned.