Calves are social animals that learn from one another. In two recent studies, we have found that the learning abilities that calves gain from these social interactions help them cope with challenges later in life.

**Housing calves in pairs**

In one experiment, calves were housed either in individual pens or in pairs from birth until 55 d of age. All calves vocalized in the days after weaning from milk at 49 d of age, but calves housed in pairs vocalized much less than did individually housed calves.

At 56 d of age, calves were moved into a group where they needed to learn to use an automatic feeder. Calves previously housed in pairs were able to learn to use the feeder in the group more quickly, and thus consumed more starter and gained more weight.

**Housing calves with a weaned companion**

In a second experiment, calves were housed either in groups of three similarly aged calves or as a pair of similarly aged calves and an older companion. Calves housed with an older, weaned companion learned to eat solid food more rapidly than did groups of similarly aged calves.

Calves housed with an older, weaned companion consumed more solid feed before (hay), and after (starter) the weaning period. The higher weight gains after weaning were likely due to increased familiarity with solid feed before weaning.

The social learning that can occur among group-housed calves promotes starter intake before and after weaning. Housing calves with an older, weaned companion may be especially beneficial in providing a social model to promote solid feed intake.