

Feed only the heifers you need

Feeding too many heifers can be a significant profit drain on a dairy. Most people know that replacement heifers account for 15 to 20% of a dairy's total cost. However, that number is completely dependent upon the number of replacement heifers being raised.

How do you know if you have too many? The table below details how many replacements are needed to maintain herd size, based on age at first calving (AFC) and cull rate. It's important to factor these variables in because they determine what age animals enter the milking herd and the turnover rate.

Age at first calving	Cull Rate %	Total number of heifers per 100 cows to maintain herd size
24	40	88
23	40	84
22	40	80
21	40	77
24	35	77
23	35	74
22	35	70
21	35	67
24	30	67
23	30	63
22	30	60
21	30	58

For example, a herd calving at 23 months with a 30% cull rate needs 63 heifers per 100 cows to maintain herd size. Change calving age to 24 months, and cull rate to 40%, and the same herd needs 88 heifers per 100 cows. Find your sweet spot to manage heifers effectively on your dairy.