

The Effects of Milk Replacer Supplemented with *Ascophyllum nodosum* as a Novel Ingredient to Prevent Neonatal Diarrhea and Improve Dairy Calves' Health

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Introduction

Neonatal diarrhea in dairy calves remains one of the most significant challenges facing the dairy industry globally. It is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality among young calves, often resulting in severe economic losses for farmers due to increased veterinary costs, reduced growth rates, and, in some cases, premature culling of affected animals. As the industry seeks innovative solutions to improve calf health and reduce the incidence of diarrhea, the incorporation of novel ingredients into milk replacers has gained considerable attention. One such ingredient is *Ascophyllum nodosum*, a type of brown seaweed that has shown promise in enhancing gut health and overall immunity in young calves [1].

A. nodosum is known for its rich nutritional profile, containing a variety of bioactive compounds, including polysaccharides, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. These components can play critical roles in supporting the developing immune system of calves, particularly during the early postnatal period when they are highly susceptible to infections and diseases. The potential of *A. nodosum* as a supplement in milk replacers stems from its ability to modulate gut microbiota, enhance nutrient absorption, and promote overall health. The primary mechanism through which *A. nodosum* exerts its beneficial effects is its impact on the gut microbiome. A healthy and balanced gut microbiota is crucial for nutrient absorption, immune function, and disease resistance in young animals. The inclusion of *A. nodosum* in milk replacers has been shown to positively influence the composition and diversity of gut microbiota, promoting the growth of beneficial bacteria such as *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium* while inhibiting the proliferation of pathogenic species [2].

Description

In addition to its effects on gut microbiota, *A. nodosum* contains specific bioactive compounds, such as alginates, which have been demonstrated to possess prebiotic properties. Prebiotics are substances that serve as food for beneficial gut bacteria, enhancing their growth and activity. By supplementing milk replacers with *A. nodosum*, farmers can potentially improve the digestibility of nutrients, thereby supporting better overall growth and development in calves. The importance of immune function in preventing neonatal diarrhea cannot be overstated. During the first few days of life, calves rely heavily on passive immunity obtained from colostrum. However, the absorption of immunoglobulins from colostrum is influenced by various factors, including the health and nutrition of the dam, the timing of colostrum

feeding, and the calf's own health status. *A. nodosum* has been found to possess immunomodulatory properties, meaning it can enhance the immune response in calves. By incorporating this seaweed into milk replacers, farmers may help boost the calves' immune systems, providing an additional layer of protection against pathogens that cause diarrhea [3].

Research has indicated that calves fed milk replacers supplemented with *A. nodosum* exhibit improved health outcomes compared to those fed standard milk replacers. Studies have reported lower incidences of diarrhea and improved growth rates in calves receiving *A. nodosum*. The reduction in diarrhea not only leads to better health for the calves but also translates to lower veterinary costs and improved productivity for farmers. The timing and method of supplementation are crucial for maximizing the benefits of *A. nodosum*. Early introduction during the milk replacer feeding period is essential, as this is when calves are most vulnerable to gastrointestinal infections. Furthermore, the dosage and formulation of the milk replacer should be optimized to ensure that the calves receive adequate amounts of the beneficial compounds found in *A. nodosum* [4].

Another aspect to consider is the palatability of milk replacers supplemented with *A. nodosum*. It is vital that the inclusion of this novel ingredient does not adversely affect the acceptance of the milk replacer by the calves. Research has shown that well-formulated milk replacers with *A. nodosum* can maintain or even enhance palatability, ensuring that calves consume the necessary amounts for optimal growth and health. Furthermore, the environmental sustainability of incorporating *A. nodosum* into dairy systems is an appealing factor. Seaweed farming has a lower environmental footprint compared to traditional agricultural practices. Utilizing this marine resource can contribute to more sustainable livestock production while also addressing the challenges of feeding a growing global population [5].

Conclusion

While the benefits of *A. nodosum* are promising, further research is needed to fully understand the mechanisms of action and the optimal conditions for its use in dairy calf nutrition. Future studies should focus on long-term trials to assess the cumulative effects of supplementation on calf health, growth, and performance. Additionally, exploring the specific components of *A. nodosum* that contribute to its beneficial effects could lead to the development of more targeted supplements tailored to the needs of young calves.

In conclusion, the integration of *A. nodosum* into milk replacers represents a novel approach to preventing neonatal diarrhea and improving the health of dairy calves. Its ability to enhance gut health, boost immune function, and support overall growth makes it a valuable addition to calf nutrition. As the dairy industry continues to confront challenges related to calf health and welfare, innovative solutions like *A. nodosum* provide a pathway to not only improve the immediate well-being of calves but also to promote sustainable and productive dairy farming practices. Continued research and education will be vital in maximizing the benefits of this natural supplement, ensuring a healthier future for dairy herds and the industry as a whole.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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