

How many calves does a cow have in a lifetime?

Like humans and other mammals, in order to make milk a cow needs to give birth. Dairy cows are pregnant for about 9.5 months and in the U.S., cows give birth for the first time when they are about two years old. Although twins are possible, it's not the norm and most cows will give birth to a single calf at a time, either a heifer (female) or bull (male) calf. After giving birth, cows are bred again a couple months later, they milk for just over 300 days, and then they are dried off (they no longer produce milk). The dry period usually lasts 45-60 days, allowing the cow some time to rest before giving birth again. As one local dairyman puts it, cows get their maternity leave for a couple months before they give birth. It usually works out that cows are giving birth every 12-14 months. With the life span of U.S. dairy cows averaging 4-6 years, most cows have 2-4 calves in a lifetime.

~ Lindsay Ferlito, Regional Dairy Specialist, NNY Regional Agriculture Program