



Calf Rearing Fact Sheet: Getting started

People and facilities

Key Points

1. Get the right person to rear the calves and ensure they have the resources and support to do the job well.
2. Calf sheds need to be draught free but well ventilated at a high level.
3. Maximise sunlight – it is a natural steriliser.
4. Bedding needs to be clean and dry.
5. Calves need access to fresh water at all times.

Would you swap places with your calves??



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Staff

- Select and invest in the right person - rearing calves requires skill, attention to detail and empathy with the calves.
- The best rearer is someone who actually wants to do the job, not someone who is directed to do it. Keep trained staff in the calf shed.
- Ensure they have the time and support they need to do the job well.

Facilities

- The calf shed should be dry and draught free. There needs to be airflow at a high level but no draught at calf height – a lighted match shouldn't blow out when lit among the calves.
- Calf sheds should face towards the sun. Sunlight dries out and helps sterilise the shed.
- Purpose built calf sheds can have a UV resistant plastic roof and shade cloth/fabric walls which can be rolled up for better ventilation.
- If building a new shed, consider drainage under the calf shed and design the shed so that milk/colostrum can be piped/gravity fed. Install swinging gates with self-closing latches and a raised collection pen/ramp for loading / unloading calves.
- Avoid sharp edges, nails, tin or any small gaps where calves can get their heads or hooves stuck.
- Calves need a minimum of 1.5 m²/calf. The smaller the available area per calf, the messier the shed and the more fresh bedding that will have to be added.
- All calves (including bobbies) must have access to clean fresh drinking water at all times.

Bedding

- Some calf sheds successfully use grating—as long as there is no draught coming up through it.
- Ensure bedding is topped up regularly or replaced with fresh material – untreated shavings, sawdust or bark chips are ideal. Concrete might be easy to clean but it is cold and slippery.
- Regularly (at least weekly) spray surfaces at calf level – pen fittings, walls, gates, floors/bedding with a virucide disinfectant.
- Have a separate area designated for sick calves to minimise disease spread. Clean out the calf shed at the end of the calf rearing season rather than just before the start of the next season. This allows time for sunlight to sterilise the shed.