

Housing for young calves



Location matters

All too often young calves are housed somewhere that is just either convenient for feeding, or unsuitable for larger cattle rather than in a facility designed for their specific needs. In this farmer guide we will discuss the particular needs of young calves.

- Calves should be protected from draughts by solid barriers that extend to the level of the floor so they can shelter
- In exposed buildings consider creating protected areas for young calves

Wind speed matters

- Calves are very susceptible to the chilling effects of draughts
- Even very mild draughts of a few miles an hour will chill calves, reducing feed conversion efficiency and increasing susceptibility to disease
 - A 5mph draught will reduce the 'effective' temperature by 8°C



Danger Signs

- On a breezy day check whether a lighter flame will flicker in the lying area of your calf pens
- Do calves huddle in a particular area of the pen?
- High feeding level with poor growth rates



Fresh air matters

- Stale, stagnant air that is contaminated with dust, moisture, ammonia and viruses that can cause pneumonia needs to be removed and replaced by fresh air
- Unfortunately young calves often do not generate sufficient heat to drive the stack effect
- Ventilating calf buildings with fans, if designed and sited appropriately can ensure a ready supply of fresh air

Danger Signs

- Smell of ammonia in a shed
- Dark, poorly lit areas of a shed
- High incidence of calf pneumonia

Moisture

- High moisture levels in calf sheds promote the survival of harmful bacteria and viruses
- Damp sheds are also colder than dry ones
- Prevent moisture entering from outside the building
- Promote the removal of moisture generated from inside the building
 - Create good drainage
 - Use plenty of absorbent bedding
 - Sweep or scrape pooled moisture from a building

Danger Signs

- Wet floors
- Sweat and dirt on coats
- Condensation on underside of roof

