

FrontLine®

TECHNICAL INFORMATION FOR TODAY'S FEED PROFESSIONAL



Housing for Calves and Heifers Part 1 of 3

Calf Facilities

Young calves can be divided into three basic groups, newborns, transition groups, and the adolescent group. We will focus our attention on newborn calves, those from birth to about 10 days post-weaning. For optimal health, pre-weaned calves should be housed individually, without contact to older animals or other calves. Calves need individual attention and observation during this time when they are most susceptible to disease and health challenges. If housed individually, calves will also have access to feed and water without competition.

Much emphasis has recently been placed on calf and heifer housing. Custom heifer raising and high replacement heifer values are reasons for interest. Although housing is only a small percentage of the total cost of raising calves from birth to weaning, it is still an important capital expense. As with any capital expense, producers must weigh the pros and cons of each option and find a solution that best fits the economic, labor and biosecurity constraints of the operation.

The three main types of calf housing include: individual hutch, unheated calf barn and a heated calf barn. Each has advantages and disadvantages, but all should provide a clean, dry, and draft-free environment.

Individual Calf Hutch

Items to keep in mind:

- Can be purchased or built on the farm
- Must be located on a surface with adequate drainage
- Hutch should face to the south in cold climates

Advantages:

- Ability to relocate between calves, giving the ground a chance to “rest” between individual calves.
- Good self-ventilation
- The calf has a well-defined eating and resting place
- Easy to clean
- Lack of contact between the calves minimizing the spread of diseases
- Lowest initial investment cost as compared to barns

Disadvantages:

- Decreased labor efficiency with the need to transport feed
- Outside feeding, especially in inclement weather
- Lack of shade in the summer



These calf hutches have excellent drainage with a gravel base.

Calf Hutch Providers:

CalfTel® Hutches: www.hampelcorp.com

Calf Condo™ Hutches: www.calfhutch.com

Polyethylene Calf Hutches:

www.polyprocessing.com

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Part 1 of 3

Heated Calf Barn

Items to keep in mind:

- Consists of elevated, individual stalls with flush alleyways underneath
- Drainage flows to a nearby waste disposal system and requires liquid manure disposal capabilities
- Ventilation and temperature control are critical to the success of this type of calf housing

Advantages:

- Convenience for feeding, not as far to deliver feed and temperature-controlled environment
- Increased labor efficiency with no bedding and automatic flush system

Disadvantages:

- Maintenance of ventilation system to prevent moisture, odor and gas buildup
- Higher operating costs than hutches or unheated barn
- Lack of calf exercise with smaller individual stalls
- Disease and health challenges without adequate ventilation

Unheated Calf Barn (Plastic and fabric covered arch-frame structures)

Items to keep in mind:

- Temporary or semi-permanent structures
- Naturally ventilated with sides and flaps to adjust animal environment
- Individual pens should have solid sides or be spaced apart to prevent calves from suckling each other
- Sometimes require frequent adjustment of natural ventilation components
- Resist placing pens against the outside wall where precipitation can fall in the resting area
- Provide a well-graded stone base to promote drainage

Advantages:

- Inside feeding facilities for feeder comfort
- More calf exercise capability than raised stalls
- More air flow than heated barn
- Less expensive than a heated barn

Disadvantages:

- Risk of moisture and odor buildup
- Must be large enough to properly clean and “rest” individual stalls between uses
- Higher disease risk if proper ventilation cannot be maintained
- Higher initial investment than calf hutches

As you can see, there are many options for housing young calves. It is important to spend time reviewing the needs, capital investment and operation objectives to choose the right option for each farm. More information will be presented in the next few FrontLine® articles about housing options for pre-weaned calves.