



KEEPING CALVES HEALTHY - HOUSING

AIM: TO PROVIDE FARMERS WITH INFORMATION ON TYPES OF CALF HOUSING.

- ❖ Female calves are your future milking animals. So it's important – and good business – to look after them properly.
- ❖ By looking after them you aim to **stop them from dying**, help them **grow well** and **maximise your profitability** (lifetime milk volumes and their own calves who will in turn produce more milk and more calves).

Why should I keep my calves in a house?

- Keeping calves warm and dry means they can use their energy to grow strong and healthy instead of using it to keep warm.
- It also means you can:
 - know how much they are eating and drinking;
 - monitor their growth rate;
 - allow their immune system to fully develop whilst stopping them from getting infections from other animals;
 - prevent them from catching parasites from older animals;
 - prevent them from wandering and eating things which may make them sick, e.g. pieces of plastic, rotten food;
 - stop them from having an accident, e.g. being trampled by a bull, being strangled by a tether rope.

So what makes a good calf house or calf pen?

- The pen should be:
 - **clean, dry** and **protected from the weather** (direct sunlight, rain and wind), e.g. avoid direct sunlight, position the entrance in a south-easterly aspect, install a rain/wind shield if required.
 - **well ventilated** to allow air to circulate (helps prevent pneumonia);
 - **big enough** for the calf to move around, e.g. (120cm x 80cm x 80cm);
 - Have **clean comfortable bedding**.
- As calves are social animals, it is also good for them to be able to **see or hear other calves / animals** from their pen.
- Calf pens should be spaced out to prevent calves from sucking each other.
- Calves can be housed in groups from the fourth week of life.

Cleaning and disinfection of calf housing

- Make sure calf pens are clean and dry when moving calves into them.
- Clean and disinfect pens once calves leave them. This will help get rid of infections (viruses, bacteria and fungi) and parasites. Good disinfectants include: Biodan and Pynol.

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What bedding should I use?

- Good options are: straw, sawdust or sand;
- Make sure bedding is of good quality (i.e. straw should not be mouldy and sawdust should not be too dusty)

Keeping the bedding clean and dry

- Inspect pens every day and remove urine and dung, or put more bedding on top if using a deep litter system.
- A good test is to kneel on the floor for 30 seconds. Your knees should be dry when you stand up.

REMEMBER to safely dispose of any bedding.

Examples of calf housing



Thatched roof and walls from local poles. Shade, ventilation and protection from rain.



Calf pen with bamboo sides and some shade from a tree. No protection from the rain.



Calf pen building – shade, ventilation and protection from wind and rain



Individual calf pens – separated, but can still see, talk to other calves

If you have concerns about your calf's health, contact your **local veterinary officer**.

ZDTP is focused on supporting dairy farmers to improve their productivity, milk quality and linkages to urban markets. The views expressed in this publication are those of the implementers of the programme and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Zealand Government. For further information, please contact ZDTP on zdtpinfo@primeconsultants.net. Follow us on www.zambiadairy.com, Facebook (facebook.com/zambiadairy/) and Twitter (@DairyZambia).