WINTER CALF HOUSING

Calves need protection from the elements and some exposure to the sun

A SOUTH-FACING hutch with an open front is ideal, situated over a gravel bed 100 centimetres deep, or about 40 inches. Only one calf should be placed in each hutch. Before moving a new group of calves into hutches, you should clean and disinfect them.

Hutches provide the best biosecurity for calves. They are isolated from one another, reducing the chances for spreading disease, and are also an affordable way to house calves.

Calves need protection from the elements and some exposure to the sun. A south–facing hutch with an open front is ideal, situated over a gravel bed 100 centimetres deep, or about 40 inches. Only one calf should be placed in each hutch. Bedding should be long straw, four to six inches deep and cleaned out or freshened frequently. Wood shavings covered with straw make the best bedding since the absorbency of the shavings keeps the calves drier.

Before moving a new group of calves into hutches, you should move them to different locations to clean and disinfect them. If this is not possible, the hutches should be turned upside down and at least exposed to sunlight to rid them of any potential diseases.

WARM HOUSING SYSTEMS

Buildings that are considered to be warm housing have mechanical ventilation and supplementary heat, and are enclosed permanent structures with an insulated exterior. There are advantages to raising calves in a warm housing system if close attention is paid to air quality, but also some drawbacks.

Advantages:

- Comfort for the operator;
- Less space required per calf;
- Easier to mechanize;
- Easier to treat sick calves;
- Less possibility of water supply freezing.

Disadvantages:

- Higher costs to build and operate (fuel, electricity);
- Possible faster spread of disease due to higher concentration of animals;
- Respiratory problems in calves if barns are not properly ventilated.

HEATING

Since ventilating a barn removes heat, the small amount of heat a calf gives off may need to be supplemented. The amount of heat a calf needs depends on the number of animals in the building and the amount of wall and window space. Insulation minimizes conduction heat loss, creating an efficient heating ventilation system.

TYPES OF HEATING SYSTEMS

Gas, oil or electric heaters all supply heat. Directional or non–directional heaters equipped with fans are not recommended, but if you use a directional unit, do not aim it at the calf. Radiant heaters are not recommended since all objects or animals in its rays get very warm before any animals outside the rays are warmed. Each heater should be controlled by a thermostat set at one to two degrees below desired building temperatures.

Veal Farmers of Ontario is a producer-run organization representing both grain-fed and milk-fed veal farmers dedicated to promoting and enhancing a viable and competitive Ontario veal industry through innovation, marketing, advocacy and education.

Calf Care Corner delivers the latest information and ideas to help you improve the way calves are raised on your farm. If you have any comments or questions about *Calf Care Corner*, send an email to info@calfcare.ca.