



Background

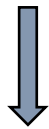
Housing calves in small groups of 2-7 calves pre-weaning has welfare benefits compared to both individual housing and housing in larger groups. Individual housing in the milk-feeding period is stressful for calves because it prevents social behaviour and restricts calves movement. Housing calves in groups larger than 7 calves is associated increased incidence of respiratory disease.

How does the strategy work?



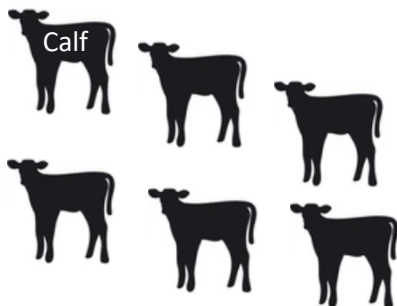
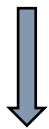
First 12 to 24 hours

- With the dam.
- 4 L colostrum within 6 h followed by 4 L whole milk twice daily



Until 7 days old

- In individual straw bedded pen
- 4 L whole milk twice daily (8L/d)



From 1 to 10 weeks of age

- In straw bedded group pen
- Milk allowance gradually increased to 5 L milk twice daily (10 L/d)
- 75 % whole milk, 25 % replacer
- A barrier (e.g. metal or wood) protruding into the pen is placed between teat buckets when milk is fed to prevent milk stealing
- Gradual weaning from week 7 to 8
- Moved as a group to larger group pen at 10 weeks of age

Positive features

Group housing of calves in groups of 2 - 7 improves calf welfare when compared to individual housing. Calves have;

- Improved learning ability
- Better social skills
- Social support
- Higher solid feed intake
- Reduced labour

In addition, when compared to housing in large groups, calves have;

- Reduced respiratory disease
- Reduced mortality of calves
- Reduced competition

Be careful, especially on these points

- Group similar aged calves
- Keep group size small (<7) and stable
- Pair-housing is also group housing
- Protect calves from competition
- Do not wean and re-group at same time
- Combining existing groups after weaning

Equipment involved? Investment?

Investment may be required to develop existing facilities or build new accommodation. In addition, more straw will be required for bedding.

Specific advises

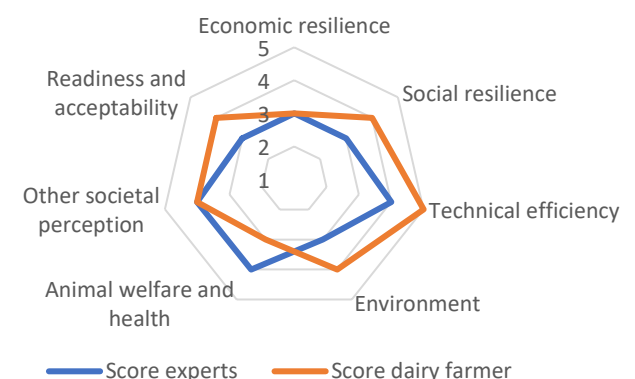
To reduce competition for milk

- Feed high milk allowances
- Place barriers between buckets

To prevent abnormal sucking behaviour

- Feed milk via a teat, e.g. teat-bucket
- Teat available for 20 min after feeding

Assessment of method



Quote of the farmer:

"Improved calf housing has a highly positive effect on overall animal welfare resilience"