



Good practices for calf rearing that leads to high productive dairy cows		
Topic Animal Welfare 	Topic Economic Resilience 	Background Youngstock can often be overlooked as the incur cosy rather than delivering an income. Rearing quality heifers is essential to maintain dairy herds. To achieve key targets (such as 24-month calving), a good start in life is essential. This factsheet with outline Good practices for calf rearing that leads to high productive dairy cows.

How does the strategy work?

Biosecurity & Vaccination

- Work with your vet to develop an effective vaccination strategy for your farm
- Develop a biosecurity plan for your farm
- Promptly isolate sick calves
- Regularly clean and disinfect, calving and calf pens
- Clean and disinfect feeding equipment after every feed

Colostrum management

- Quickly – collect and administer colostrum as soon as possible after birth
- Quantity – Calves should be fed 3-4L colostrum at birth (equivalent to 10% body weight)
- Quality – Test the colostrum to ensure antibody concentration is at least 50g/L IgG

Housing

- Good hygiene: the ability to be efficiently and effectively cleaned
- Good drainage
- Fresh air delivery: natural ventilation, with competent inlets and outlets and mechanical help if needed
- Moisture control: sloped floors, good drainage, control of leakages and good ventilation
- Air speed control: Fresh air is an essential requirement for good health, but draughts must be avoided at calf level.

Nutrition

- Provide calves with sufficient milk of replacer to achieved
- An unlimited supply of clean, fresh water
- Starter concentrate consumption should be encouraged from the first week of life
- Provide a high-quality fibre source such as chopped straw from early life to promote rumen development
- Regularly weigh calves to ensure growth targets are being met

Positive features

- Correct colostrum management will give calves the best level of antibody immunity to prevent disease burden
- Healthier calves that have not had growth checks from disease will be less likely to be culled when in the milking herd, cutting down the replacement rate
- Improved ventilation and drainage will reduce disease pressure, cutting down on Vet and Medicine costs, as well as calf mortality

Be careful, especially on these points

- Good hygiene is essential to prevent disease spread and must be taken seriously by all staff members
- Attention to detail is key; early identification, isolation and treatment of sick calves will significantly reduce the chances of permanent damage to calf health

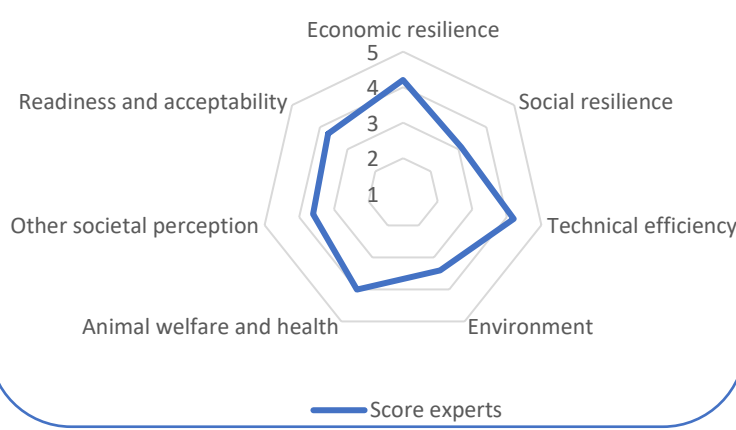
Specific advises

- Calf management starts at the beginning of the dry period – make sure that the cow is receiving the correct dry cow feed and mineral supplements to produce good quality colostrum.
- Ensure the calving area is clean and disinfected after every calving if possible

Equipment involved? Investment?

- Calf house modifications may be required to improve ventilation and drainage – eg. cement, drains, Positive Pressure Tube Ventilation (PPTV).
- Hot water provision, disinfectant and adequate cleaning utensils for improved hygiene. Pressure washer for regular cleaning
- Isolation pens to reduce disease spread – around €200-500/calf space

Assessment of method



Quote of the farmer:

“Good calf management is essential for the future productivity of my dairy herd”

