FriarsMoor Livestock Health

OCTOBER NEWSLETTER

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BOOK ONLINE

BUILDING A NEW CALF SHED

By Bogdan Butnaru, Vet MRCVS

Getting the roof, walls & sides, floor and internal design right for healthier calves

Building a new calf shed can seem daunting, whether it is a self-build or professionally designed and built. Good calf housing comes down to fresh air, low moisture, good drainage, dry bedding, suitable temperatures, enough space and calf comfort. Design the building around the calf, rather than simply adapting an existing building.

1. THE ROOF – KEEPING AIR MOVING

The roof plays a vital role in ventilation, temperature and moisture control. Good ridge ventilation allows warm, moist air to escape. As a guide, provide around 0.04m² of ridge outlet per calf up to 100kg, increasing to 0.1m² for growing stock. Rooflights provide natural light, but south-facing rooflights can increase heat gain. Consider prevailing wind and rain direction and avoid creating a building that is too enclosed.

2. THE WALLS & SIDES – FRESH AIR WITHOUT DRAUGHTS

Walls and sides control fresh-air entry and protect calves from wind and rain. Ensure sufficient inlet area and that openings work effectively with the roof outlet. Open sides, Yorkshire boarding, curtains or pull-up sides can all work, depending on the site and design.

FRESH AIR → GOOD AIR MOVEMENT → NO DIRECT DRAUGHT AT CALF LEVEL

High humidity can make calves feel colder and allow pathogens to survive for longer. Keeping the building dry and well ventilated is therefore important for disease control.

3. THE FLOOR – KEEP THE BED DRY

Floors and drainage are key to controlling moisture. Concrete floors should have a minimum slope of 5% (1 in 20). Drainage channels can remove water and urine and keep passageways clean.

Drain water away from the bed – not through the bed.

If a calf's legs are fully covered in straw when lying down, there is sufficient straw to allow nesting. Calf pens should be cleaned out at least every 30 days, with wash water draining away without contaminating neighbouring pens.

4. INTERNAL DESIGN – DESIGN FOR THE CALF

The layout should make it easy to feed, bed, clean and manage calves. Allow at least 1.5m² per calf up to 150kg, 2.0m² between 150–200kg and 3.0m² above 200kg. Pen size should suit group size and feeding system, with enough front space for calves to feed comfortably.

Calves under eight weeks have a reduced ability to regulate body temperature, so newborns may need extra energy below 10–15°C. The priority is always fresh air without direct draughts.

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BUILD VENTILATION INTO THE DESIGN

Ventilation must do more than move air. It removes excess heat, water vapour, microorganisms, dust , distributes fresh air and maintains suitable air speed at calf level. Natural ventilation can use the stack effect, allowing warm, moist air to rise and escape.

Positive pressure tube ventilation (PPTV) can provide controlled fresh air throughout the shed. It should run continuously, delivering air evenly at calf level without direct draughts, with an air speed of around 0.2m/s.

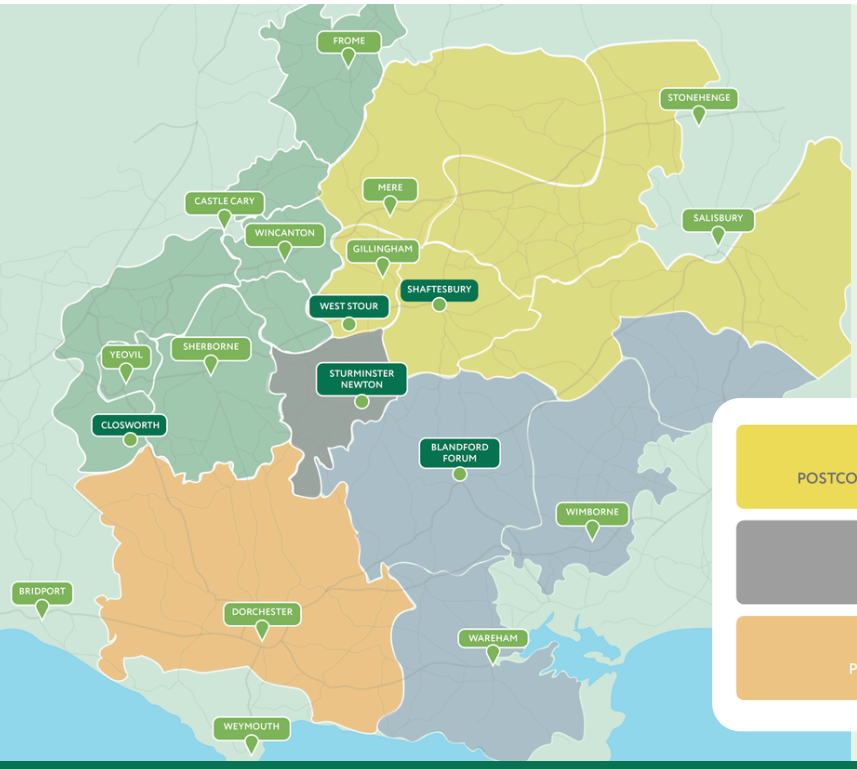
Remember practical details such as drinkers away from bedding, separate isolation facilities, safe access for feeding and cleaning, and allowing for calves to grow. Where practical, avoid sharing airspace with older cattle.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The number of calves determines the required building size, air inlet and outlet areas and ventilation capacity.

A successful calf shed should provide fresh air, good drainage, dry bedding, suitable temperatures, enough space and a draught-free environment.

BEFORE BUILDING, ASK:
Where will the fresh air come from? Where will the moisture go? How will I keep calves warm, dry and draught-free?



MEDICINE DELIVERY ROUND

Our medicine delivery service is available to all our clients, orders received by 11am on Monday mornings will be delivered by the end of the week (minimum order value £50+VAT).

Speak to the farm office to find out more: 01258 472314.

WEDNESDAY POSTCODES: BA12, SP3, SP5, SP7, SP8	THURSDAY POSTCODES: BA8, BA9, BA10, BA11, BA22, DT9
WEDNESDAY POSTCODES: DT10	FRIDAY POSTCODES: BH20, BH21, DT11, SP6
THURSDAY POSTCODES: DT1, DT2	BRANCH

UPCOMING COURSES & EVENTS

Find out more: fmlh.co.uk/events

AI COURSE 12 OCT

HOW TO GET MINERAL NUTRITION WORKING WELL IN THE BEEF SUCKLER SYSTEM 13 OCT

FMLH DAIRY YOUNGSTOCK GROUP WITH UNIFORM AGRI 14 OCT

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY & HANDLING FOR SMALLHOLDERS 14 OCT

DEREK VS DEREK FREE SCREENING FOR FARMERS 20 OCT

ON-FARM SCORING & NUTRITION DISCUSSION 17 NOV

MILKSURE 20 NOV

BACON BUTTY BREAKFAST 10 DEC

HELP US SUPPORT LUCY

250 miles of training since July and Lucy is set to run the London Royal Parks Half Marathon on October 11th for ARC, a charity that supports parents who face complications during pregnancy. Lucy will be hugely grateful for any support you can offer.
https://arc-uk.enthuse.com/pf/lucy-hepworth