

Pre-calving checklist

The lull before calving starts is a good time to plan for a trouble free calf rearing period by making sure that everything is in order before the first calf hits the ground. A comprehensive checklist, divided into different areas, is a sensible way to make sure nothing has been overlooked in your preparations.

Below is a suggested pre-calving checklist, focussing on several areas of calf management.

Calving area

The health of both the freshly calved cow and her calf can be severely compromised if the calving area is contaminated.

- Y/N Calving paddocks spelled before calving?
- Y/N Access to muddy areas prevented by electric fencing?
- Y/n Area around water trough gravelled and well drained?
- Y/N Calving paddocks split into small segments?

Calf shed

To raise healthy heifer calves, calf sheds need to be clean, well ventilated, bedded with fresh bedding and big enough to raise the expected number of heifers. Make a generous "guesstimate" of how many heifers will be born before the first calves are ready to go out of the shed. It is better to plan some temporary housing rather than over crowding the existing shed.

- Y/N Shed cleaned thoroughly, disinfected, aired and rebedded?
- Y/N Ventilation adequate – no smell of ammonia?
- Y/N Ability to provide fresh, clean water to each pen?
- Y/N Area big enough for the estimated number of heifers?
- Y/N Alternative housing if an overflow is expected?

Equipment and supplies

Checking equipment and supplies before the start of calving can deliver good health outcomes for calves and can save time and unplanned trips to town. Once again, making a list ensures that vital things are not overlooked. Things to check are:-

- Adequate supply of calf bedding on hand
- Calf jack, chains etc. – make sure all the parts can be found and are clean
- Supply of obstetrical lubricant, sleeves, soap and disinfectant
- Notebook/calf birth sheets for recording calf birth details
- 7% iodine for navel dipping
- Ear taggers and tag supplies
- Colostrometer for measuring colostrum quality
- Containers for storing colostrum
- Milk fridge/freezer emptied and cleaned
- Fridge/freezer operating temperatures checked with thermometer
- Calf milk vat scrubbed and temperature checked for accuracy
- Oesophageal tube feeder checked and cleaned
- Milk feeders/ buckets/ hoses etc. scrubbed thoroughly
- New teats for feeders
- Grain feeders clean and undamaged
- Supply of calf grain ordered
- Check use by dates on drugs and electrolytes left over from last season
- Order electrolytes and any feed additives
- Talk to vet about need for/supplies of needles, syringes and antibiotics
- Vaccination & drench programmes discussed with vet
- Vaccination & drench supplies & equipment checked
- Check condition and accuracy of calf scales or weigh tapes
- Notebook/computer programme for recording calf rearing results – details of sick calves, treatments, deaths, growth rates etc.

Management results

Improvements can only be made if the starting point is known. Go through last season's calving figures and use them to set targets to which improve on last season's results.

- Y/N Accurate quantification of last season's heifer rearing results?
- Y/N Accurate evaluation of the reasons for deaths and illness last season?
- Y/N Percentage of last season's heifers meeting growth goals calculated?
- Y/N Management changes implemented to improve on last year's figures?

Employees

Employees are often responsible for the success or failure of calf rearing. Avert potential problems by writing a checklist of what is expected of employees, particularly new ones, and how induction and training is going to be handled. Planning will result in happy, healthy calves and beneficial employee/employer relationships.

- Y/N Written job description?
- Y/N Documented orientation procedure?
- Y/N Designated person to supervise and train the new employee?
- Y/N Standard operating procedures in place to standardise routine tasks?
- Y/N Written method of teaching new tasks?
- Y/N Written training plan for employee's supervisor to follow?
- Y/N Has the employee been given clearly defined performance objectives?
- Y/N Is there regular non-confrontational employee performance evaluation?
- Y/N Are employees rewarded for excellence?