

# dairying

## Good accommodation gives

With tighter calving patterns and growing herds, there is an even greater need for calf accommodation

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**C**alf housing is often forgotten about, virtually until calving starts. And in a couple of months, they'll be coming in thick and fast. Not enough time to build a new shed maybe, but it's worth considering the principles of good calf housing to ensure you make the most of what you have.

Shed space allowance is critical. Each calf requires between 1.8m<sup>2</sup> to 2.3m<sup>2</sup>. This space provides them with the freedom to grow and develop comfortably. COVID-19 has given us an unwelcome reminder that disease-causing agents love to develop in buildings.

While calves don't get COVID-19, air space is crucial in calf accommodation to avoid the build-up of a range of infectious bugs and bacteria. Each calf requires 7m<sup>3</sup> of air space within the shed, increasing to 10m<sup>3</sup> by two months of age. To assess your own shed, measure (length x width x avg height) / 7.

For more information on calf housing specification, see *SI124 Minimum Specification for Calf Housing July 2016* on DAFM website.



Barry needed accommodation for a maximum of 100 calves, as he sells any surplus.

The shed is made up of five pens on either side of a central passage. The passage way at the rear of the shed can double as a bedded area when numbers increase, to make a larger group pen. Each pen divider can be opened, making larger group pens possible. This suits the three-station automatic feeder, which was also installed.

"The shed has three sliding doors in the front, which helps greatly when cleaning out. The four pen dividers are hinged, so they can be opened back against the walls and cleaning out is very quick. The calves are moved to the central passage during cleaning and are back to a fresh bed within minutes."

There is a small door at the rear of the shed leading onto a paddock, if Barry wants to allow calves out during the day.

"The floors in all pens have a slope of 1:20 out from the side walls – the concrete contractor thought I was mad, but I wouldn't change it for the world. The calves' bed stays drier for

### Benefits of a purpose-built calf shed

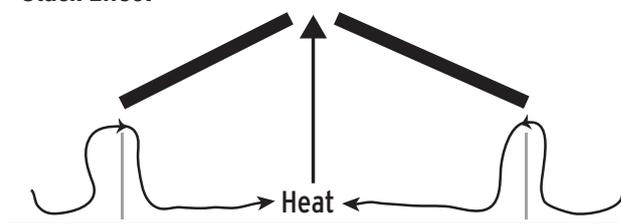
Barry Grace runs a 140-cow, spring-calving dairy herd in south Kilkenny alongside his agricultural contracting business. "I've been tightening my six-week calving rate and this has put pressure on the calf housing," he says.

"Pre-2019, our housing consisted of calf hutches and smaller group pens in multiple houses. There was no issue with disease in the calves, but the labour involved in hauling milk and straw to multiple locations in the yard was very time consuming with a contracting business to run too."

In 2018, Barry constructed a new calf shed that would cater for all his calf housing needs under one roof.



### Stack Effect



### Factors:

- Heat produced
- Heat lost
- Outlet size
- Inlet size
- Height difference inlet to outlet

# calves a great start



Colin Brennan and Barry Grace.

longer and less additional bedding is required.”

All effluent from the pens is directed into a channel in the central passage. A slope of 1:80 in the floor from the



rear to the front of the shed ensures quick movement of effluent outside to an adjacent slurry tank. When the shed is not occupied, it is used to store machinery and straw.

### Feeding routine

Barry feeds calves on whole milk for 14 days, as he is vaccinating against rotavirus, coronavirus and e.Coli and wants to ensure full immunity is transferred. They are then moved on to the automatic feeder.

“Calves transfer to the automatic feeder with little hassle and the information the feeder provides regarding feeding lets me know if a calf hasn't consumed their allowance,” says Barry.

### Calf rearing tips

- Calves spend 80% of their time lying down, so dry, comfortable bedding is essential.
- Keep your clothes as clean as possible when going near the young animals, as you may be transferring harmful bugs and bacteria from other areas of the farm to the calf shed.
- Check ventilation in pens by kneeling down – if there is a smell of ammonia, there is a ventilation problem. Also, if you get wet knees off the bedding – there isn't adequate straw.
- The longer the calf shed is empty of calves and bedding between groups, the fewer disease-causing organisms will be present when it fills up again.
- Use smoke pellets to test airflow in your calf shed and address any issues.

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