

Planning prevents accidents

Accidents relating to livestock on farms are not inevitable and can be prevented through careful planning and task organisation during the busy times of the farming year. Livestock-related incidents account for 25% of Irish farm accidents and 15% of farm mortality among older farmers. Attacks by cows which have recently calved are a common cause of such accidents. It is the farmer's duty to see that the necessary infrastructure is in place for their own safety, the protection of other farm employees, and the comfort of their animals.

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Livestock-related incidents account for 25% of Irish farm accidents.

Risk assessment

Always carry out a risk assessment before entering a pen with a cow. This is most important when a cow is showing signs of calving, freshly calved or in the first few days after calving. Gauge how safe or dangerous the

situation is before you become a casualty. There is no room on any farm for animals with a bad temperament, especially after calving. Cows showing calving aggression should be culled. When looking at your breeding programme, it is

important to prioritise docility within the herd. Always have an escape route planned when entering a calving pen. Carry your phone at all times and keep it secure in your pocket, especially at night if you are

checking the cows. Let a family member know that you are heading out, and how long you think you will be. There is an easy-to-follow risk assessment on page 4.

Calving facilities



Well-designed calving pens and gates minimise farmer-cow contact.



Calving can be a very anxious time for both the farmer and the cow. There are a number of options listed below which have the potential to reduce stress and fatigue at calving time.

Calving camera

Calving cameras and other electronic devices are good investments on farms. They allow you to review the status of cows and calves from the comfort, and safety, of your home – or bed. With fatigue common during this time of year, technology can help you to get a good night's sleep, thus preventing sluggish judgement and potential accidents.

Calving pen

The calving area should provide good space, be disinfected and well-bedded with clean dry straw, free of obstructions and have good lighting. The calving pen should be cleaned out after each calving to reduce the risk of disease.

Well-designed calving pens and gates minimise the direct physical contact between the cow/heifer and the farmer. It should provide the farmer with access to both sides of the animal. Calving jacks and mechanical lifting aids, such as a pulley system, in the calving pen can help to prevent back injury.

Young children

Young children love going to calving pens and want nothing more than to see the new arrivals. However, they should never be allowed in the calving shed since a cow that has just given birth may see them as a threat.

Never allow children to become involved with cows during or after calving. Keep them away from fields with bulls at all times. Dogs should also be excluded as they can very easily spook a cow.

Stay safe during autumn calving period

Ensure that you have sufficient calving pens available for your herd size and calving pattern. It is recommended that there be one calving box per 10 cows. This is where a cow and calf only remain in the pen for one to two days. If there is a tight calving pattern, you will need extra pen space. A calving pen should be at least 3.6m x 4.0m in area. A farmer should ensure before the calving season starts that all doors and gates in the calving shed are secure and in good working order, and that oil is applied to gate handles where appropriate. If there are loose bolts or hinges on gates or doors, replace and repair them before the calving season starts, so you do not have to worry about doing so when time is limited.

Expect the unexpected and plan for emergencies, follow these tips:

- keep your mobile phone in your pocket so you can call for help if needed;
- someone should always know where you are and when you are expected to return;
- keep a first aid box in your shed, with supplies of plasters, bandages and disinfectant to treat minor cuts and grazes; and,
- keep feed reserves readily available in case temporary staff need to tend your cattle at short notice.



To view some tips about safety at calving, check out the video at the following link (or via the QR code) featuring farmer, Aonghusa Fahy, who

participates in the Future Beef programme.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7mi4XPbOjs>.

TAMS 3 grants

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) provides grant aid under the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) 3 for investments, including livestock-handling equipment. The rate of grant aid available for farm safety eligible items is 60%. Grant-aided safety items include mobile handling

equipment, fixed cattle handling units, cattle crushes, penning equipment, backing gates, head gates, and head scoops. For more information contact your local Teagasc advisor or see:

<https://www.teagasc.ie/news-events/daily/other/tams-3-eligible-items-reference-costs-and-grant-rates-revealed.php>.

Calving risk assessment

	YES	NO
My skills and experience help me to identify signs of stress and aggression among cattle.		
The number of cows and the duration of calving is appropriate to my facilities and workload.		
I manage cow body condition to maximise the number of unassisted calvings.		
I keep pens clean and dry to reduce workload associated with disease and infection.		
My vet is generally available and the distance to the vet practice does not pose a risk.		
Cows due to calve are moved into single pens two to three days prior to calving or due date.		
Large group calving pens are subdivided into smaller cow groups.		
Refuges within the pen are provided.		
If cows calve on their own they are left to do so.		
If a cow is unable to calve, they are restrained in the head-locking unit situated in each pen.		
If the handler needs assistance help is requested and if necessary the vet is called.		
When a calf is born and breathing alright, the navel is disinfected.		
The cow must only be released from the headlock unit from outside the pen.		
When separating cow and calf, a gate is kept between the cow and handler.		
Waste needles and materials are disposed of in accordance with waste disposal procedures.		
Individual restraining calving facilities are available close to a slatted area.		
Wide passageways and good lighting are available leading to/from the calving pen.		
New pens are made from appropriate materials.		
A ratchet neck head gate with rope close-off is provided in the calving pen.		
A multi-open restraining gate is provided in the calving pen.		
Only competent people are allowed to undertake these tasks.		
Personal protective equipment (PPE) must be worn.		
Mobile phone at site in the event of emergencies.		
Calving cameras are used to reduce visits to the calving pen.		
Calving jack available and used correctly.		
Floor surfaces are non-slip and trip hazards are removed.		
Breeding policy maximises the number of unassisted calvings.		
Difficult animals are culled.		
Breeding policy prioritises docility within the herd.		