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Agribusiness **Dairyman**

VOLUME 26 • NUMBER 4 APRIL 2007

Focus:

Calves & Replacements



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Choosing the Best Calf Housing System — Indoors or Outdoors

By Joe Weber
Calf-Tel

Whether you're raising calves indoors or out, there are several commonly accepted fundamental elements that remain the same: comfort, separation, ventilation, health and bio-security, ease of use and economy. You can have the latest system available but if these fundamentals are not met – your success rate will suffer. There are numerous housing options available: wood, metal, fiberglass, plastic and high-density polyethylene, to name a few. The housing system you use can have a huge impact on your calf management. With so many options available, choosing the right one can be difficult. The last thing you want is to invest in a housing system that does not work for you. To help make the right decision, look at the fun-



Joe Weber

damental calf-raising elements and rate each system's ability to help you achieve success in each of these areas.

Comfort

Calves in a comfortable environment will grow faster and be healthier. Energy will be utilized for growth and development vs. fighting environmental stressors. All housing systems must allow calves to have easy access to feed and water. The system should also provide the ability for the calf to find its own microclimate for optimal comfort. Outdoor hutches must provide protection from the sun's rays and be UV resistant. If the sun's ultra violet rays penetrate the hutch, a green house effect will occur. The result of this is extreme heat during the day, rapid shifts in temperature as the sun sets and increased condensation during the night, all of which is unhealthy for the calf.

Separation

Due to the immature immune system in calves, it is important to separate

them to prevent/limit potential pathogen transmission. Separation also allows for improved observation and individual care. Calf hutches need to be spaced to prevent calf-to-calf contact and calf pens need to eliminate direct contact through feed openings, vents and other possible points of contact.

Ventilation – Indoors

Ultimately the building will dictate overall ventilation, but there are key factors the pen system you use must meet. Calf pens should allow for maximum front panel venting. Adjustable rear venting is also important and gives you the ability to adjust the amount of airflow within the pen to allow for extreme temperatures and the constant supply of fresh air.

Ventilation – Outdoors

Hutches should have adjustable rear venting and ridge top venting. Large rear vent openings provide flexibility in dealing with the ever changing weather and the change in seasons. Ridge vent-

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ing plays a crucial role in hot and cold weather. In hot weather a ridge top vent will increase the airflow through the hutch, helping to keep it cool. In cold weather, large rear vents are typically closed to keep in the warmth. A ridge top vent is then needed to allow for air movement, which reduces condensation and supplies a constant flow of fresh air.

Health and Bio-Security

The right housing system will help you achieve: improved calf health, performance, lower mortality rates, reduced medicine costs and reduced veterinary costs. It is important to have a system that will not absorb or promote bacterial growth. Bacteria that has embedded itself into a hutch or pen can be transferred from calf to calf. The material should be non-porous, impervious to manure acids and strong disinfectants. The more porous the surface is the more bacterial growth will occur. Due to this, some calf raisers are moving away from wood and fiberglass pens and hutches.

Ease of Use

Successful housing systems must have easy access to feed and water, for the calf raiser and the calf. The housing system should be lightweight and easy to set up, configure, expand and clean.



The easier it is to move and clean - the cleaner it will be kept. If indoor pens are used for only a brief time of the year, be sure the system is flexible. It should be lightweight, easy to set up, take down and store for later use and should not require permanent installation.

Economy

Profitability is a crucial factor. The housing system must meet all the basic requirements and be affordable.

Hutches and pens should not deteriorate or break down - necessitating constant maintenance or routine replacement. Wooden hutches and pens may have a lower initial investment, but factor in: loss rates, medicine and veterinarian costs, maintenance - labor and materials into the equation. Compare this total to the cost of manufactured pens and hutches. Labor is not cheap, so be sure the system you choose is not labor intensive. Ask yourself these questions. Is it easy to install? Does it require permanent installation? Can one person move it? Can one person clean it? Is it easy to clean? Does it require maintenance? How long will it last?

How to choose the best calf housing system? When comparing housing systems you want to be sure you're getting a system that will, first and foremost, meet all the calf-raising fundamental requirements: comfort, separation, ventilation, health and bio-security, ease of use and economy. The right system will help you meet these requirements. When looking at a new calf housing system and comparing the numerous options available, focus on the requirements. Choose the system that will assist you the most in meeting these requirements.

For more information contact: Joseph Weber, Ph: 262-532-9074 email: JoeWeber@hampelcorp.com, or log onto: www.calf-tel.com. ■

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