

Winter Check for Young Calves



CALF CHECK – WINTER EDITION

(Print and hang in the calving pen or calf housing)

Immediately after birth

- Within 2 hours: 3-4 litres of high-quality colostrum.
- Check colostrum quality with a refractometer (Brix value).
- Dry the calf thoroughly and place it in a draught-free, dry environment.

Housing and bedding

- Add extra bedding for warmth and comfort. A thick, dry layer of straw. The calf should be able to “nest” in the straw.
- Ensure dry, draught-free housing. No draught or direct wind around the calf’s head and neck.
- Check for moisture or wet spots in the lying area daily.
- Remove wet straw and replace when needed.
- Check whether ventilation is adequate without cold air currents daily.

Flooring

- Check if the floor stays dry and clean in wet weather.
- Use a pen with a floor if the ground is too wet.
- Place a draining layer (sand, gravel) under floorless pens. Ensure proper slope so rainwater drains away.

Temperature & comfort

- Control the ambient temperature with adjusted feeding, good bedding, calf jackets or body warmers, and if needed provide infrared heating or a heat lamp.
- Check for cold spots regularly.
- Provide extra warmth for very young calves: heat lamp or calf jacket/body warmer.

Feeding and energy

- Increase the concentration of calf milk or add an extra feeding with the usual concentration: Extra milk or higher energy intake is needed at temperatures below 10-15°C. Provide sufficient drinking moments (min. 2×/day, preferably 3× in cold weather).
- Provide clean, lukewarm drinking water. Extra fluid improves intake of roughage and concentrates.

Outdoor housing and heavy rainfall

- Feed smaller portions more frequently to keep feed as dry as possible.
- Cover the feed bucket after filling.
- Use easily removable buckets so they can be dried quickly.
- Remove feed that has become too wet.

Protection

- Use a calf jacket or body warmer for young animals in extreme cold.
- Check that jackets are dry and hygienic regularly.

Monitoring

- Watch out for shivering, a hunched posture, reduced suckling, or lethargy.
- Measure body temperature if in doubt (below 38.5°C = risk).
- A healthy calf = active, calf has a dry nose, bright eyes, smooth shiny clean coat, upright ears and is warm.
- Hang a min/max thermometer near the calves. At low temperatures calves need more energy; adjust milk concentration or number of feedings accordingly.