


How do your calf-rearing practices stack up?

 **TAKE THE QUIZ TO FIND OUT!**

Raising strong, healthy calves is the foundation of a productive, high-performing dairy herd. Every decision you make in their early weeks – housing, feeding, hygiene, and health care – affects their growth, resilience, and future milk production.

Review and refresh your calf-rearing management with the help of our handy checklist – tick all the practices your farm implements to identify opportunities for improvement, then add up your score to find your result.

1. CALF SHED SETUP &

INFRASTRUCTURE

Basic Needs (Minimum Standards)

- ☐ Dry, draught-free shelter
- ☐ Adequate space (at least 1.5m² per calf)
- ☐ Clean water available at all times
- ☐ Good ventilation to reduce ammonia buildup
- ☐ Clean and dry bedding (wood chips, shavings or hay/straw) deep enough to nestle down in

Better Practice

- ☐ Slope or drainage to prevent water pooling
- ☐ Temperature regulation (shade in summer, windbreaks in winter)
- ☐ Passageways - Each pen should have its own entry point, allowing access without the need to walk through other pens
- ☐ Roof over the loading/unloading area

Gold Standard

- ☐ Raised feeding platform to reduce cross-contamination
- ☐ North-facing shed for maximum sunshine
- ☐ Insulated building
- ☐ Calf covers/jackets for calves outdoors
- ☐ Reticulated water and/or milk

2. HYGIENE & DISEASE

MANAGEMENT

Basic Needs

- ☐ Separate pen for sick calves
- ☐ Bedding topped up regularly
- ☐ Equipment cleaned with disinfectant after each use
- ☐ Boots and clothing changed before entering the calf area
- ☐ Regular rodent and pest control measures
- ☐ Limit visitors to the calf pens, only those that need to be there

Better Practice

- ☐ Disposable gloves used when handling calves
- ☐ Quarantine area, separated by passageway, for sick calves
- ☐ Use an All-in, all-out method (calves are not moved from pen-to-pen)
- ☐ Footbath at entry points, regularly cleaned and disinfectant replaced
- ☐ Equipment cleaned with hot water and disinfectant after each use
- ☐ No shared equipment between sick and healthy calves

Gold Standard

- ☐ Sick calf pen in different shed than replacements

- ☐ Dedicated staff for calf rearing (to limit contamination from older cattle)
- ☐ Controlled visitor access with sign-in requirements
- ☐ Solid partitions between pens (at least 1m high)

3. COLOSTRUM MANAGEMENT

Basic Needs

- ☐ First feed of colostrum within 6 hours of birth
- ☐ Calves receive at least 2L of high-quality colostrum in the first feed

Better Practice

- ☐ Colostrum tested with a Brix refractometer (target: >22%)
- ☐ Minimum of 4L of high-quality colostrum (>22%) within 12 hours of birth
- ☐ Stored colostrum kept refrigerated or frozen

Gold Standard

- ☐ Calves are blood sampled by vet to test for success of passive transfer
- ☐ Individual calf records for colostrum intake
- ☐ Colostrum pasteurised before storage

4. FEEDING & NUTRITION

Basic Needs

- ☐ Twice-daily feeding with milk or milk replacer (4L/day lifting to 6L/day)
- ☐ Water from birth, straw or meal from 1 week
- ☐ Weaning from 8 weeks, done gradually over at least four weeks

Better Practice

- ☐ Twice-daily feeding with milk or milk replacer (6L/day lifting to 8L/day)
- ☐ Transition milk used for at least 4 days
- ☐ Meal contains at least 20% protein

Gold Standard

- ☐ Twice-daily feeding with milk (6L/day) lifting to ad lib with automated feeder)
- ☐ Fibre (straw/hay) and meal from birth

5. HEALTH & WELFARE

Basic Needs

- ☐ Calves monitored daily for signs of illness
- ☐ Navel sprayed at birth with iodine or disinfectant
- ☐ Vaccinations are given per vet recommendations

Better Practice

- ☐ Health records maintained for each calf

Gold Standard

- ☐ Monitoring weight gain
- ☐ Test replacement calves for BVD at disbudding/dehorning
- ☐ Structured calf enrichment (brushes, interaction)

Overall Results & Next Steps

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0-20 POINTS:

Strengthen the Foundations

Your farm is covering some basic calf-rearing needs, but there are important areas where improvements could significantly boost calf health and future productivity. Small changes like improving colostrum management, enhancing hygiene, and increased feeding can reduce calf mortality and disease risk. Stronger foundations mean healthier, more resilient calves that transition smoothly into the herd. Start by identifying one or two key areas to improve and build from there. Every step forward helps ensure your young stock grow into productive, high-performing cows.

40+ POINTS:

Leading the Way in Calf Rearing

You're excelling in calf care, providing a strong foundation for your future herd. Your attention to colostrum management, hygiene, nutrition, and welfare ensures that your calves are developing optimally. To push even further, consider advanced strategies such as automated feeding, genetic testing for parentage and production, or structured welfare monitoring. Fine-tuning these last few details can make a big difference in maximising efficiency, reducing losses, and increasing long-term profitability. Your commitment to best-practice calf rearing is setting your farm up for long-term success.

Regardless of your score, every improvement in calf care translates to healthier, more productive animals. Investing in strong early-life management not only benefits individual calves but also strengthens the overall performance and profitability of your herd. Keep striving for better, and your future cows will reward you with improved efficiency, longevity, and production.

21-39 POINTS:

Fine-Tune for Better Performance

You have a solid calf-rearing system, with good housing, feeding, and biosecurity practices in place. Your calves are likely on track for strong development, but refining your approach can unlock even better results. Focusing on areas like testing colostrum quality, increasing milk intake, or implementing stricter biosecurity can further reduce disease risks and improve early growth rates. Taking your system from 'good' to 'great' will not only improve calf survival but also enhance lifetime milk production and overall farm efficiency.

For support and information on improving your farm's calf-rearing practices, contact your local Farm Source team or register for a Farm Source event in your area.

