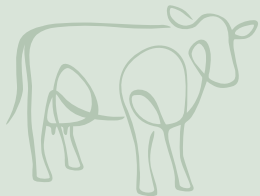




Best practice farms promote optimal preparation of cows for calving by adjustment of the diet, treatment of underlying problems, and habituating the animals to post-calving conditions.



Why is this important?

A well-managed dry-off period (end of lactation to calving) significantly improves calving success and cow health at the beginning of lactation. Careful dietary and environmental care in this last stage of pregnancy are essential to prevent obstetric issues that can severely impair the health and welfare of both cows and calves.



Good practice

- ✓ High roughage content diets should be provided at the beginning of the dry-off period.
- ✓ During the dry period, cows may require supplementation of trace elements and minerals to protect their foot and claw integrity and reduce the risk of lameness.
- ✓ During the dry period provide 150-200 g/day per cow of mineral supplementation. Total calcium input should be limited to 60g per day.
- ✓ Body condition scores at the time of calving should be between 3-3.5 (on a 5 point scale).
- ✓ Both excessively fat and thin cows are at higher risk of dystocia and require assisted calving. It is important to monitor and adjust diet accordingly during the later stages of pregnancy.
- ✓ Careful management of body condition in early pregnancy will help avoid the need for nutritional restrictions during the last trimester, which increase the risk of complications such as compromised placenta and foetal weights and uterine inertia (deficient relaxation of the pelvic musculature/ ligaments which aids natural calving).
- ✓ Cows who are about to calve should be fed a diet similar to that of lactating cows.

See the  **Cow Nutrition factsheet** for more information



Best practice

- ★ **Best practice** farms provide individualised diets for each animal ensuring a smooth transition from gestation to lactation diet.

See the  **Cow Nutrition factsheet** for more information





Environment

Health

Behaviour



Good practice

- ✓ At dry-off, cows must be separated from the lactating cows and should be moved to a dedicated dry-off pen or paddock.
- ✓ The dry period should last 6-9 weeks. Dry cow accommodation should be clean and comfortable and situated away from the parlour and lactating herd.
- ✓ Cows can be dried-off when they produce 12 L milk/day or less. If the cow is still producing significant volumes of milk at the time of dry-off, gradually reduce milking frequency (over at least 5-7 days).

See the  **Cow Environment factsheet** for more information



Best practice

See the  **Cow Environment factsheet** for more information




Good practice

- ✓ During the 'transition period' (weeks before and after calving) cows should be monitored closely as they are at higher risk of illness due to hormonal fluctuation, immune suppression and the stress associated with calving.
- ✓ The transition period increases the risk of mastitis and attention should be given to prevention, detection and prompt treatment.
- ✓ Body condition scoring (BCS) in the dry period is a useful animal based measure for metabolic disease since over-conditioned cows (BCS of 4 or more on a 5-point scale) are at increased risk of reduced dry matter intake and metabolic disorders.
- ✓ During the dry-off period, an intramammary antibiotic can be administered to cows with high somatic cell counts (if prescribed by your veterinarian) and an internal teat sealant may be indicated, to limit bacterial entry into the teat after the last milking.

See the  **Managing the Dry Period factsheet** for more information



Best practice

See the  **factsheets on Cow Metabolic and Nutritional disease, Cow Reproductive, Cow Infectious Disease, Cow Locomotion and Cow Udder Management** for more information



Good practice

See the  **Cow Behaviour and Human-Animal interactions factsheet** for more information



Best practice

- ★ **Best practice** farms move cows in pairs or stable groups to the dry-off pen or paddock, if it is permitted by the herd size. This ensures ongoing social support in the new environment and helps them adjust better.

See the  **Cow Behaviour and Human-Animal interactions factsheet** for more information



Summary

Careful dietary and environmental care in the final stages of pregnancy are essential to prevent obstetric issues that can severely impair the health and welfare of both cows and calves.



Farm

Careful management and planning of nutritional, health and behavioural factors will improve the success of the calving season and reduce the losses associated with high complication rates.



Cows

When consideration is given to the nutritional, health and behavioural requirements of cows, the risk of complications at calving can be reduced significantly and the quality of the calves produced improved.



Handler

Use of the farm database and documentation of the agreed standard operating procedures, will ensure consistency and clarity for the people responsible for managing the movement and dietary management of the cows during the dry period.

Take pride in all of your farm's good and best practices towards animal welfare!

Additional resources



Care4Dairy.eu