

Hints and tips on managing calving

Best practice farms achieve healthy, natural calving by selecting sires for calving ease, careful management of pregnant animals, monitoring at calving to enable timely and effective intervention when needed and permitting dam-neonate interactions.

Good practice
Best practice

Monitor individual cow weights and Body Condition Score when pregnancy is confirmed and before calving.



Adjust diet of thin and fat cows in the latter stage of pregnancy to avoid dystocia.



Feed cows who are about to calve a diet similar to milking cows.



Provide a separate clean, dry, and deep bedded calving area with 20m² for each cow (indoors).



Ensure the number of calving pens is proportional to number and intensity of calvings.



Incorporate handling facilities in the calving pen, and hot water and a power supply in proximity.



Monitor cow weight and body condition score when pregnancy is confirmed and before calving, to optimise feed management and BCS at calving.

Provide a separate calving area (20m²/cow) with clean, dry, deep bedding and handling facilities. Keep the bedding clean and disinfect the pens after each use. Protect cows calving at pasture by providing shelter.

For outdoor calving on pasture: ensure cows can move freely and provide shelter to protect from cold and windy conditions.



Replace bedding and disinfect calving pens after each use.



COWS



Nutrition



Environment



Behaviour



Health



Look for signs of first stage labour, calving, and post calving behaviour; sensors and cameras can help.



Employ low stress handling to move cows in pairs or groups to the calving area. Look for signs of first stage labour, calving and post calving behaviour; sensors & cameras can help. Allow healthy cows to interact with their calf after calving.

Know the signs and stages of calving and only intervene when strictly necessary. Assess the calf size and position, before employing ropes or a calving jack. Assess the need for pain relief and call for veterinary assistance if calving is not progressing or the placenta has not been expelled within 12 h of the birth.

Check size and position of calf before using a calving jack or ropes and call the vet if there is no progress.



Move cows to the calving area in pairs or groups in the case of a general calving area.



Allow healthy cows to interact with their calf after calving.



Intervene in calving only when it is strictly necessary.



Assess the need for pain relief and contact the vet for difficult calvings.



Call the vet if placenta is not expelled within 12 h of the delivery of the calf or there are signs of fever, vulval discharge.

