

Section 8

Health and safety around Calving and Calf Facilities



Introduction

Accidents and illness related to farming are not inevitable and can be prevented through planning and careful work organisation. A quarter of Irish farm accidents and one fifth of farm deaths in older farmers are livestock-related. Attacks by recently-calved cows are a common cause of such accidents. Ensuring appropriate facilities are in place to provide comfort and safety for themselves, other farmworkers and their animals is the responsibility of the farmer.

- ① Housing.
- ② Calving facilities.
- ③ Calf houses.
- ④ Loading and unloading ramps.

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① Housing.

- All houses should be adequately ventilated allowing for an adequate supply of fresh air, allowing heat dissipation and preventing the build-up of carbon dioxide, ammonia or slurry gases.
- Surfaces that cattle walk on should be designed, constructed and maintained to avoid discomfort, stress or injury to the animals. Surfaces should be even and non-slip to avoid dangerous underfoot conditions. Uneven surfaces cause bruising of the feet and smooth surfaces can cause slipping.
- The accommodation should contain sufficient sources of natural or artificial light so as not to cause discomfort to the animals. Artificial light should also be provided to enable adequate inspection of the animals in particular for cows in late pregnancy and young calves.
- Each building should have a suitable smoke or fire alarm system installed in order to detect fire or smoke. All electrical fittings should meet Health and Safety requirements

② Calving facilities.

Calving can be an anxious time. Good calving facilities, such as calving cameras, calving gates and non-slip calving jacks can reduce the stress on both the farmer and the animals.



Calving facilities should be designed to minimise stress for the mother and calf and maximise safety for the stockperson.

The calving area should provide adequate space, be tidy and well-bedded with clean dry straw, free of obstructions with good lighting. Well-designed calving pens and gates minimise

the direct physical contact between the cow/heifer and the farmer.

- The facility should provide the farmer with access to both sides of the animal.
- Calving jacks and mechanical lifting aids, such as a pulley system, in the calving pen can help to prevent back injury.
- The floor must be free of tripping hazards such as twine, stones or pieces of timber.

KEY POINT:

Farmers should also be aware of zoonotic infections which can be contracted by humans around calving.



Farmers/vets should always wear arm length gloves and washable protective clothing and boots.

③ Calf houses.

With housed calves there is a lot of manual work, whether it be feeding, cleaning the pens, drenching, vaccinating or if a calf simply needs to be lifted. The basic requirements for calf housing have been defined in law (SI24:2009, www.agriculture.gov.ie). These specifications also provide a safe facility for working with calves.

Calf facilities must be:

- Constructed to provide clean, dry, warm and draught-free accommodation without risk of injury to the health of animals and workers.
- Designed to allow for appropriate feeding, cleaning, disinfection and general hygiene.
- Designed to allow thorough inspection of calves and easy stock management.
- Adequately ventilated at all times.

- Designed so that air circulation, dust levels, temperature, relative humidity and gas concentrations are kept within limits that are not harmful to the animal.

Calf facilities must have:

- Adequate unobstructed floor space.
- Facilities for storing and handling wastes.
- Accommodation for the isolation of sick calves.
- Adequate natural and artificial lighting.
- Adequate drinking water.
- Adequate drainage.

④ Loading and unloading ramps.

Many injuries arise when loading and unloading cattle. A suitable loading ramp is essential for safe loading of trailers or trucks.

All ramps must have ramp gates in place which are strong, secure, operate freely and lock securely when closed. It is important that you are patient and calm when loading calves, and allow adequate time for cattle to load.

When loading, take care when closing up the ramp gates. Always stand to the side when lifting the ramp and seek assistance wherever possible so as to avoid back injury.

Any steps for cattle must be less than 20cm high and the ramp angle less than 15 degrees (HSA-Guidance on Safe Handling of Cattle on Farms). Non-slip surfaces are important and in some instances straw or hay should be spread on the loading ramp.

When the ramp is lowered to unload, step well to the side. If slow to unload, let the animals come off in their own time.

KEY TIPS:



Don't rush animals when unloading them as they will be more difficult to manage and will always want to leave the trailer on subsequent journeys.

More information

Teagasc has more detailed information and advice on all aspects of calf rearing and dairy calf to beef systems on its website. Scan code below to access.



Further information

Further information can be sought from the following websites:

Teagasc website.	https://www.teagasc.ie/animals/
Animal Health Ireland.	http://animalhealthireland.ie/
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.	https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/
European Commission.	https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/welfare/practice/farm/calves_en http://ec.europa.eu/food/animals_en
European Food Safety Authority.	http://www.efsa.europa.eu/
Dairy NZ.	https://www.dairynz.co.nz/
Calcare Canada.	http://calcare.ca/
Scotland's Rural College.	https://www.sruc.ac.uk/
Health and Safety Authority.	http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Your_Industry/Agriculture_Forestry/
United States Department of Agriculture.	https://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome