

## Section 2

# Habituation To a new Environment



### Introduction

When calves arrive at the new farm it is important to make sure there are adequate facilities to unload them safely and efficiently. In addition, correct calf facilities must be in place prior to their arrival so that calves can be unloaded without delay and begin acclimatising to their new environment.

- ① Unloading calves.
- ② Disease risk of bought-in calves.
- ③ Electrolyte provision upon arrival.

# Habituation

## To a new Environment

### ① Unloading calves

Calves should be unloaded from the vehicle into appropriate facilities as soon as possible after arrival at their destination. Sufficient time should be allowed for unloading to proceed quietly and without unnecessary noise, harassment or force. For this task, a loading ramp with solid sides is best.



*A non-slip unloading ramp will help prevent calf injury.*

The facilities on arrival should provide all animals with appropriate care and comfort, adequate space and ventilation, access to water and shelter from extreme weather conditions. An animal that has become sick, injured or disabled during a journey should be appropriately treated. The calf should be unloaded in a way that causes the least amount of suffering. It should then be placed in a separate pen with the appropriate facilities made available i.e. water, clean bedding etc.



*Enough time should be allocated to allow calves to be unloaded calmly and efficiently.*

**2 Disease risk of bought-in calves.**

Buying calves always carries the risk of introducing infectious agents, the worst case being infections that have not been on the farm before. An example is *Mycoplasma bovis*, which is a widespread problem with bought-in calves and can cause a form of pneumonia that is very severe and difficult to treat.

**HOW TO:**

**Avoid disease introduction**

- Buy calves directly from producers. Buy from as few different sources as possible.
- Ideally buy from producers you know and trust.
- Always keep bought-in animals separate from your own stock in a quarantine area for at least a week. A small pen is required for this confinement.
- Observe calves carefully twice a day while they are in quarantine and carry out any assessments and/or testing recommended by your vet. The most important things to look for are:
  - Injuries that might have occurred during transport.
  - Lameness or uneven gait.
  - Evidence that the calf is sick; lethargic, sunken eyes, drooped ears, panting.
  - Evidence of diarrhoea and/or blood in the faeces.
  - Check rectal temperature of calves 1-2 hours after the calves arrive - if you detect fever (over 39.5°C or 103.1°F, contact your vet for advice and treatment).
- Bought-in calves released from quarantine should preferably be introduced to home-reared calves after turn out to pasture.



Calves will rapidly adapt to their new environment if conditions are appropriate.

**3 Electrolyte provision upon arrival.**

During transport it is common for calves to lose weight due to lack of food and water. This can lead to dehydration, loss of electrolytes and low blood sugar. To help counteract this, two litres of electrolytes should be given after resting for two to three hours. This will help reduce dehydration and increase appetite or food interest. A multi-vitamin injection can also be administered within two days of arrival and again 10 days later.

Feeding schedule for the first four days:

Day	Time	Feeding Schedules	Concentrates
1	PM	Provide <i>ad lib</i> access to warm electrolyte solution and allow the calf to rest overnight	----
2	AM PM	2L of milk replacer (38°C) 2L of electrolyte solution (38°C)	----
3	AM PM	2L of milk replacer (38°C) 2L of electrolyte solution (38°C)	Handful
4		Normal feeding schedule	<i>Ad lib</i>

**KEY TIPS:**

**Feed electrolytes for the first 12 hours after delivery.**