

# Building a calf shed

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Research

## Key Points

1. Low cost calf sheds can be constructed using UV resistant plastic. This has the advantage of letting in sunlight which acts as a natural sterilant.
2. Site sheds so that shelter belts protect people, calves and shed from prevailing winds.
3. Face calf sheds into the sun for warmth and sterilisation.
4. Ventilation is important – not draughts at calf height but provide air movement at a high level.
5. Decide on your milk feeding system—this usually dictates the size, shape and layout of pens.



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Calf Rearing Fact Sheet 1.2

## General design

- A good calf shed is one that meets the needs of both calves and calf rearers.
- Calves can be reared in a wide range of facilities from converted implement sheds to purpose built calf sheds.
- Use existing shelter belts where possible. These make the environment warmer for people and calves, while protecting sheds from wind damage.
- Ventilation is important. There should be air movement above the calf to prevent the build up of ammonia and subsequent problems with pneumonia. Solid partitions between pens prevent draughts.
- Many sheds now have a UV resistant plastic roof and shade cloth on the walls which can be rolled up for ventilation. Such sheds can be built at much lower cost than traditional sheds because of the lighter materials used.
- Sheds (and calves) should face into the sun. Sunlight is not only good for keeping calves warm it also dries out and disinfects the pens.
- If building a new shed, consider drainage under the shed. Ideally, the shed should be higher at the back and have some form of drainage at the front.
- Consider covered areas for storing feed and mixing milk. Load-out facilities and a race with calf scales are very useful.
- Have a separate pen where sick calves can be placed in isolation.
- Avoid sharp edges, nails, corrugated iron or any small gaps where calves can get their heads or hooves stuck.

## Pens, bedding and feeding

- An area of 1.5 m<sup>2</sup>/calf is a minimum and pens of 10–12 calves are ideal. In an open fronted shed, pens should be twice as deep as they are wide.
- Decide on your milk feeding system and design pens to suit. If hanging a feeder on the front of a pen there needs to be sufficient space for all calves to feed.
- The best systems involve having calves of a similar age together and having a separate quarantine area for new arrivals.
- The best bedding is whatever is readily available at a reasonable price. Bark chips, post peelings and sawdust are all useful. Bedding should be at least 200–300 mm deep. Fresh bedding needs to be added as calves get older and pens get messier.
- Slatted floors and under pen drainage are good provided there are no draughts.
- Modern sheds feeding whole milk should be designed so that milk is piped (gravity fed) to avoid carting milk.
- All calves (including bobbies) must have access to clean drinking water.
- A perimeter guard around each trough (see next page) can prevent fouling.



