

Preparing for a Successful Calving Season

Preparation is Key - Areas to focus on:

STEP 1

REVIEW LAST YEAR'S CALVING

- What went well?
- What could be improved?

STEP 2

DRY COW HEALTH

- **Importance of Diet:** A balanced diet before calving is critical for the growing foetus, udder repair and quality colostrum production.
- **Forage Analysis:** If not already done, get forage analysed and work with a nutritionist to tailor the diet accordingly.
- **Body Condition Score (BCS):** Aim for a BCS of 3.0–3.25 at calving. Overfat cows are more prone to calving difficulties and metabolic diseases like milk fever or ketosis. Cows in poor BCS will take longer to resume cycling post calving.
- **Nutrition:** Get advice on which product(s), if any, suits your herd from your vet or nutritionist prior to purchasing.

STEP 3

VACCINATIONS

- Ensure that all vaccinations are up to date, especially if diseases like calf scour have been a concern.
- Review vaccination protocols with your vet, including the timing of pre-calving vaccinations, typically administered at least three weeks before calving.

STEP 4

CALVING SHEDS AND EQUIPMENT

- **Check Facilities:** Ensure that all gates open and close easily, the calving jack and head gates are functional, and lighting is adequate.
- **Calving Pen Setup:** The calving area should be clean, well-bedded, and have an adequate clean water supply.
- Cleanliness is crucial for reducing disease transmission. Fresh bedding and clean pens are essential to avoid disease outbreaks and maintain good hygiene practices.
- Ensure pens are well ventilated with no draughts.

STEP 5

CALVING SUPPLIES

- Ensure you have your calving supplies to hand – stock up well in advance to avoid lack of availability.
- **Basic supplies:**
 - Disposable gloves (long and short).
 - Gel & paper towels.
 - Calving jack and ropes.
 - Calcium & Iodine.
 - Containers for storing/freezing colostrum
 - Stomach tubes.
 - Ear tags.
 - App/Notebook for recording information.

STEP 6

COLOSTRUM MANAGEMENT

Importance of Colostrum:

- A calf is born without immunity to disease, so it is reliant on gaining immunity from the antibodies in the colostrum until their own immune system is fully functional. A calf's ability to absorb antibodies from colostrum decreases with time, so it's vital to provide good quality colostrum, within 2 hours of birth. Aim for at least 3 litres.
- Invest in a refractometer to measure the colostrum quality. Values greater than 22% represent good quality colostrum suitable for the calf's first feed.

Storage & Hygiene:

- It is vital to harvest and store colostrum hygienically - when bacteria get into colostrum, they bind to the antibodies resulting in the calf being unable to absorb them.
- Store surplus colostrum by freezing within 3 hours of collection (between -18°C and -25°C).
- Use warm water to thaw colostrum. Avoid using microwaves or boiling water – this can destroy antibodies.
- Have a clean, dry place to store colostrum, ideally a fridge, and ensure that it is collected as cleanly as possible. If not used within 48 hours discard.

Sources include - Animal Health Ireland



QMS
Quality Meat Scotland

