



**DAIRY FARM
MANAGEMENT
BASICS**

A Farm Management Course by
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Cattle Shelters and Cow Behavior - Article 22

Cattle, including calves, are cold weather animals. They are very comfortable at temperatures below freezing, providing they can - -

Generate body heat by digesting forages and other high energy feeds

Keep their hair coat clean and dry by being protected from inclement weather and by having a clean, dry place to rest

In the wild, animals seek out areas that are most comfortable. In confinement, they are limited to the environment and to the feed choices we offer them. Our challenge is to offer them a good environment or enough choices of environments

In caring for cattle our goal is to:

Keep their hair coat clean and dry so it functions as an effective insulator that preserves body heat. Reduce heat stress

Shelters don't have to be elaborate and expensive, only clean, dry and well ventilated. An open front barn with access to outside lots and pastures helps to accomplish this. Shelter can also be in the form of wooded areas, tall grasses, protected hillsides and well drained rest areas; that's what animals rely on in the wild. Let us not harm them by confining them to warm, stuffy, dark, dirty, barns

Calves are born with some baby fat. If they lie on cold, wet surfaces, or if their hair coat loses its insulating ability because it is wet, dirty and matted, they lose a lot of body heat. Consequently, their body fat reserves are soon depleted, and they can freeze to death

Thus, it is very important to provide young calves extra energy in cold weather by feeding them higher energy replacers or more calf starter

Also preserve their body heat by giving them a dry, fluffy rest area and a place where they can escape from inclement conditions. Well bedded calf hutches, located on well drained sites, provide these necessities. They also offer calves many environmental choices, from the deep recesses of the hutch to outside areas where there is lots of fresh air and sunshine.

Calves under about 4-6 months of age do not adapt well to being housed on concrete slabs, with no bedding, and being mixed with larger groups. Calves do better if they are moved from the hutch into another bedded pen with a small group of 3-5 other calves of similar size for about 2-3 months

Cow Behavior

Cows are social animals with herding instincts, social peck orders, maternal instincts, feelings and memories. They are regular and consistent in their patterns, and they respond to kindness - - also to abuse, but in a much different ways.

Cows basically want to eat, find a safe comfortable place where they can lie down in peace and chew their cud, make milk and reproduce - - the very same things we want them to do so they'll be profitable for us! It pays to work in harmony with them for mutual benefit.

Thus, as we work with cattle our goal is to:

Learn how cattle act, what they need and what they want.

Cater to them so they in return will reward you profitably

Listen to what the cows are telling you by the way they act. Where do they like to congregate? Where do they eat and drink the most? When do they like to eat and drink? Can we duplicate the situations they like in the way we care for them?

Do cows hesitate to use the stalls? Do they struggle when they lie down and get up? Is something keeping them away from the feeding and watering areas? Are cows reluctant to enter the milking parlor, and is it worse when certain people are in the parlor? If so, why? Can the situations that cause these reactions be fixed?

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