



Calves

Calves are a part of the dairy farm: a cow milks only after her first calf is born. The stay of the calf with the cow is regularly discussed. For the dairy sector the health of the calf is central. When a calf is born its resistance is still very low and it is important that this is built up fast. If this does not take place, the calf is very sensitive to several types of disease. Important factors that contribute to a good and responsible start are: high quality and clean cubicles, the mother's first milk (colostrum), and gradual exposure to its surroundings.

First milk



A mother's first milk is very important, because it contains antibodies and nutrients who are essential for a calf's **healthy start**. This milk is called colostrum. To offer a calf a dry and clean environment, after birth the calf is first placed in a single cubicle or igloo on the farm. This way the farmer can monitor whether the calf drinks enough milk and stays healthy. The calf can build up its resistance and grow in a safe and responsible fashion.



To stimulate a calf's natural behaviour dairy farmers use the **Calf-drinking-system**. This allows for the calf to drink whenever it wants.

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Housing



Having the calves housed separately from the cows also prohibits transfer of any sort of disease. After about three weeks the calves are moved to group housing with other calves of their age, allowing them to **socialize** with their peers. The female calves (heifer calves) often remain at the farm: they are the future milk cows of the farm. The bull calves are transported to a veal farmer.

Quality management systems



The dairy companies use quality management systems outlining specific **requirements for housing and care** per age group, thus for the cows and the calves. If an audit shows the dairy farmer does not meet the requirements, the farmer needs to remedy any problems or shortcomings within a month. Furthermore the dairy companies require the farmer to yearly evaluate the time and energy invested in raising of the calves in business health plans. They need to do so in collaboration with a certified veterinarian with which the farmer maintains a close relation.

