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Farmnote

Calf rearing : Sheds and other structures

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Regardless of how many calves you rear, it is important to decide where, and in what environment, you will house them during the early part of the rearing period. Perhaps the most important fact to remember is that the calf rearing facilities must be at least 20 metres from the dairy and, if you are going to develop your own purpose built structure, that there is an easy way to dispose of effluent or bedding material.

The flooring of your shed will depend on your personal preference. Calves inside should be on at least 15 - 30 centimetres of deep litter - do not skimp on depth to save money; in the long run you will need more before the end of the season. You should allow at least one square metre per calf, and assuming your 'mobs' comprise 20 - 30 calves the pens will need to be at least 20 - 30 square metres. (One shed in New Zealand for a farming system that is planned to milk 2300 cows over three farms has a calf rearing shed capable of housing 1500 calves for 10 - 11 weeks. - *New Zealand Dairy Exporter* July 1994). This shed uses a slatted floor but has been designed to eliminate under floor draughts. This is vital if you are using slatted floors as draughts will result in pneumonia and a constant battle with other health problems. (My preference is deep litter as it is warmer).

The period when calves are housed will vary from farm to farm. Some rearers like to keep calves inside for the whole period, others will only retain them inside for two to three weeks during the initial training period and to let the calf overcome the trauma of being removed from its mother and being placed in an intensive rearing system. Either system is acceptable provided calves have adequate shelter outside and are given adequate hard feed to build the rumen, particularly those calves reared inside.

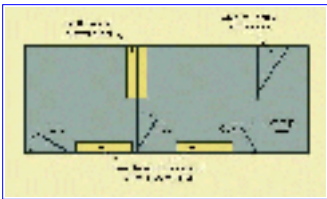


Figure 1. A schematic diagram for an existing shed such as a dairy converted for use as a calf rearing facility.

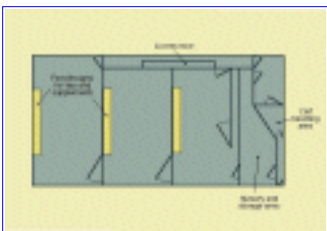


Figure 2. Schematic diagram of purpose built shed for rearing calves.



An acceptable hutch providing shelter for calves in open paddocks.

Individual hutches

Dairy farmers and calf rearers in the USA favour individual, purpose built hutches for their calves. These hutches provide shelter, dry feed, water and milk feeding for individual animals. Usually these are located in an open paddock and calves are attached to the hutches with a collar and chain. An alternative to chaining the calf is to provide a pen for the calf to run around in. These systems are ideal if you have a lot of spare or inexpensive labour which can pay attention to individual calves and spend the time carting milk, water and feed to the rows of hutches. This system is more likely to use a once or twice a day feeding system, rather than an ad lib system.



Loose pens

An inexpensive alternative is to provide pairs of calves with a circular pen made out of weldmesh. These pens can be located in a paddock close to the dairy and the milk, water and dry feed carried to them once or twice a day, depending on the feeding system which you use. This is unlikely to be used for an ad lib system as the cost of providing feeders is likely to be too high. Shelter is provided for the calves by placing a tarpaulin over one end of the pen. Clean and dry conditions are maintained as the pen can be moved easily up and down the paddock as needed.

Convert the old dairy

Converting the old dairy into a calf rearing shed is often a realistic and relatively cheap option, provided it is not located too far away from the new shed. It is usually fairly well ventilated, hopefully it is still dry and there are good facilities for keeping foodstuffs and medications dry and close at hand. The old dairy shed will probably need some modification - the pit will need filling in, but it is a good place to bury some rubbish and you should be able to divide the old milking area into at least two pens to provide calves with two weeks' accommodation before they are let outside for the rest of the rearing period ([Figure 1](#)).

Purpose built shed

If you are purpose building you have a free choice of the type of structure and the facilities you wish to have in the building. As a minimum you will need to have at least two pens to house calves for at least two weeks. The shed should have a convenient place to store feed, medications and calf reviving equipment. A nursery area for sick calves is also vital to avoid cross infections between animals and mobs within the shed. You can include an area to weigh your calves, i.e. a draughting race with crush pens or stalls for handling calves. If you are selling calves to other rearers, a loading ramp might be useful. The final design will depend on your farming system. ([See](#)

[Figure 2\)](#)

Shed construction materials will depend on its size. Pole sheds using pine are one possibility, lean-tos or existing machinery sheds are also a possibility, or many of the custom built sheds available from your local engineer would also be suitable.

[Produced by the Dairy & Apiculture Program](#) (AGWEST web pages)

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Further reading

- Farmnote no. 42/98 '[Calf rearing : feeding systems](#)' (Agdex 412/56)
- Farmnote no. 43/98 '[Calf rearing : costs of rearing calves](#)' (Agdex 412/56))

- Farmnote no. 44/98 '[Calf rearing : some general rules of thumb](#)' (Agdex 412/50)
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**Prime Notes
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Search

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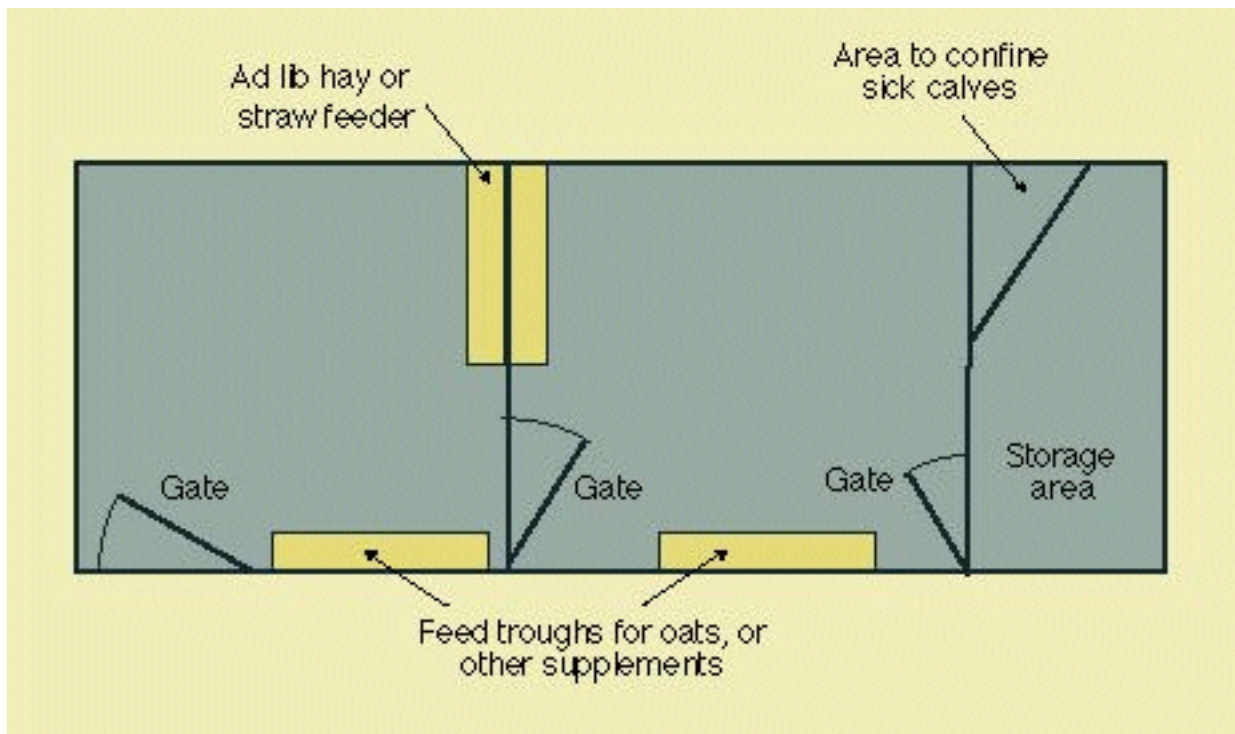


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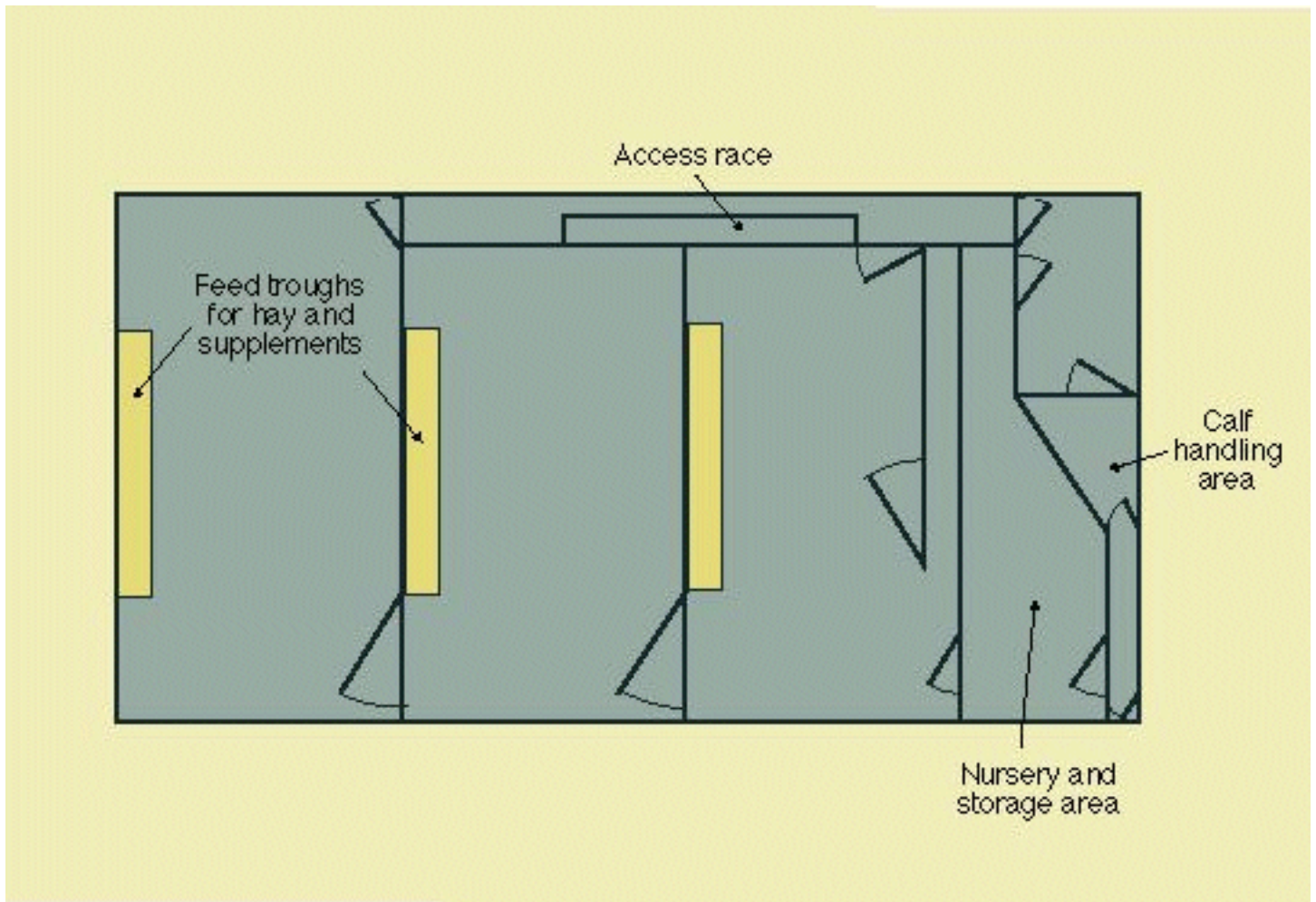


Figure 2. Schematic diagram of purpose built shed for rearing calves





An acceptable hutch providing shelter for calves in open paddocks



