

## Coaching Guide 15

# Calf rearing basics

**Aim: To ensure that employee can house, feed, water and ensure the welfare of calves.**

At the end of this session, employees will be able to safely care for healthy calves (feeding, watering, and housing), and recognise the signs of an unwell calf, taking action by informing someone.

### Before coaching starts

**Does your employee have prior knowledge or experience in working with calves?**

**Arrange for your new employee to have a least one full shift with the person rearing the calves,** (of course this will be longer if calf rearing is part of their position description). If appropriate, ask the person rearing the calves to be the coach

**Have some key booklets available through in the farm office (online and on the shelf)** for the employee to be able to read, such as

- Dairy Australia's Rearing Healthy Calves Manual
- Dairy Australia's Caring for Bobby Calves, before and during transport

**When is the best time for this coaching session – when will cows be calving?**

**Set aside time to take your new employee to the springer paddock** to look at cows on the point of calving. Getting the timing right to see calvings occur may take a bit of flexibility.

**Prepare yourself to explain, demonstrate and then observe to provide feedback on**

- How to prepare a calf pen
- How to move or lift a calf safely
- Feeding methods at different stages of calf growth
- Tube-feeding a calf
- Observing calf health
- NLIS ear tagging and calf record keeping

### COVID-19

- Reinforce PPE use, personal hygiene and cleaning/disinfection of shared surfaces after each use
- Ensure the farm COVID-19 protocol for how to work with other team members is followed, including during the coaching session

## Calf pens

- ❑ Show where the calf pens are located, and why (for shelter, access and ventilation of the shed for prevention of ammonia smell).
- ❑ Discuss that heifer calves are the next generation of cows for the herd and it is essential to rear them well.
- ❑ Show how to prepare a calf pen and explain the need for clean, dry bedding (for calf health and welfare).
- ❑ Outline the importance of checking that water is fresh and always available.
- ❑ Observe the employee cleaning out the calf pen and ensure accurately completed

Prepare a calf pen	<p><b>What do we use to construct a calf pen?</b></p> <p><b>What is used for bedding?</b></p> <p><b>How do we protect them from the weather?</b></p>
Calf welfare	<p><b>Why is it important that calf pen bedding is dry and clean?</b></p>

## Handling calves

- ❑ Demonstrate how to handle calves gently and discuss why this is important for their welfare.
- ❑ Describe when/why calves are moved (paddock to pen, treatments, iodine the navel, tagging, disbudding).
- ❑ Demonstrate how to move calves (lift, shift, load onto calf transport) using appropriate manual handling techniques.
- ❑ Observe (and assist as needed) the employee moving the calves. Provide feedback on what is done well and what is not done well. Consider manual handling and animal welfare.
- ❑ Discuss when to ask for assistance or help from another staff member.

Why calves are moved	<p><b>When are baby calves moved into a calf pen?</b></p>
Move or lift a calf	<p><b>Show me how to lift a calf safely and gently into the calf trailer</b></p> <p><b>How much does a 6 week old calf weigh?</b></p>
Calf welfare	<p><b>Why is it important to be gentle with calves at all times?</b></p> <p><b>What happens with bull calves (raised or sold for meat as 'bobby calves')? Emphasize that they are treated with respect.</b></p>

## Feeding regimes for calves

- Discuss calf feeding regimes and the importance of attention to each individual calf.
- Show how to get new calves feeding (sucking).
- Demonstrate feeding colostrum to baby calves (by tube or teat) and discuss the importance of colostrum.
  - The four Qs of colostrum feeding – Quality, Quickly, Quantity, sQueaky clean.
- Show how to collect the calf milk and fill milk feeders or bottles.
- Show how to clean the calf feeding equipment adequately.
- Explain what age calves start on grain / pellets / hay and when they are weaned. Explain the amount each calf needs to consume.
- Emphasise the importance of access to clean fresh water at all times
- One the following days, observe the employee completing the above and provide feedback on what done well and what needs improvement.

Feeding regimes for calves	<p><b>Why is colostrum important for calves?</b></p> <p><b>How do we ensure calves get enough good quality colostrum?</b></p> <p><b>How much milk do calves drink – as babies and at 6 weeks?</b></p> <p><b>When do calves start eating hay?</b></p> <p><b>At what age are calves weaned?</b></p>
Observation of feed intake	<p><b>Why is it important to take note of each individual calf during feeding?</b></p>
Cleaning calf feeding equipment	<p><b>When does calf feeding equipment need to be cleaned?</b></p> <p><b>What method do we use to clean it?</b></p>

## Calf health and welfare

- Describe normal calf behaviour and unusual calf behaviour and what to report immediately
  - Dull, not feeding, lying down, hollow, scouring, smelly
- Look at any calves in the hospital pen and describe why they are there and what is happening for them.
- Emphasise the importance of animal welfare and that calves are babies that require care and attention
- Discuss the need for and age that a calf is tagged.
- Demonstrate calf record keeping requirements (birth date, weight, food intake).

Calf Health	<p><b>What are a few signs that a calf is unwell?</b></p> <p><b>Who would you report an issue to?</b></p>
Calf records	<p><b>At what age do we tag a calf? What type of tags are used?</b></p> <p><b>What calf information is recorded?</b></p>