



FROM THE VETERINARY PRACTICE

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Cattle vet Chris Price, from the Wiltshire-based XL Vet Group's Drove Veterinary Hospital, takes a timely look at health and welfare issues effecting UK dairy herds. In this issue he looks at why calf pneumonia is still a big problem on UK units.

A dry, clean and draft-free environment is crucial

# Breathe easy this autumn

Calf pneumonia costs the UK dairy industry millions of pounds each year, in fatalities, treatment and lost potential in terms of future milk production. Yet still producers aren't 'getting it right' when it comes to preventing it.

Changeable weather, just like we're experiencing at the moment, never helps. In our region the past two years haven't been too bad as far as calf pneumonia is concerned. But it's always difficult to know how things are going to pan out as the winter-housing period progresses. So following best practice, at all times, is essential.

Poorly ventilated housing is a key causal factor on many units, exacerbated by the pressure on buildings caused by expanding dairy herds. One of the most common mistakes is overcrowding – as animals grow they take up more airspace. Housing conditions may have been adequate for 12 baby calves, but not 12 three-month-old heifers. This is why producers can see breakdowns in

mid winter. Allow at least 13 cubic metres of airspace, and two square metres of lying area, per calf.

Mixing young calves with older ones is also a 'no no', even if they're home bred. Different ages in the same building always poses a disease risk, as the older animals will expose the younger ones to more bugs.

Producers should also avoid using straw blowers to bed down calves. Showering the calf with dust and small pieces of straw creates a challenge to the calf's respiratory defence mechanisms. It irritates the lungs and this 'stress' gives any bugs that are around a chance to take hold.

Multiple procedures can also overwhelm the calf and stress can cause a dip in the calf's immunity and her ability to fight off infection. So also avoid dehorning and weaning at the same time. Spreading out procedures can be a 'labour' issue, but think how much more labour is required to treat calves with pneumonia.

