

PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL CALVING SEASON

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The 2025 calving season may still seem distant, but effective preparation now will help ensure its success when the time comes. The following are some key areas to focus on:

1. Review Last Year's Calving Season

Reflect on what went well and what could be improved to ensure the season runs as smoothly as possible this year. A digital version of this information is available on ICBF under the Stock reconciliation report. This allows you to address any issues while things are calm, rather than under pressure when the calving season starts.

2. Calving Supplies

Basic Supplies: Ensure you have all essential calving supplies on hand:

- Disposable gloves (long and short),
- Gel, paper towels,
- Calving ropes (minimum of 2 pairs),
- Calving jack, calcium bottles/boluses,
- Iodine for navels,
- Supplies for storing and freezing colostrum,
- Stomach tube x 2 – one for colostrum and one for feeding electrolytes to sick calves,
- Calf tags, notebook/phone app for recording information.

Action: Stock up now to avoid last-minute stress.



3. Dry Cow Diet

- Importance of Diet: A balanced diet before calving is critical for the growing foetus, udder repair and quality colostrum production.

Action: If not already done, conduct a silage analysis and work with a nutritionist to tailor the diet accordingly.

- Body Condition Score (BCS): Aim for a BCS of 3.0–3.25 at calving. Overfat cows are more prone to calving difficulties and metabolic diseases like milk fever or ketosis and cows in poor BCS will take longer to resume cyclicity post calving.
- Nutrition: A pre-calver mineral mix, with trace elements like magnesium to prevent milk fever, is crucial and should be fed for at least 6 weeks before calving. As there are many options available, get advice on which product suits your herd before choosing one.

4. Vaccinations

- Ensure that all vaccinations are up to date, especially if diseases like calf scour have been a concern.

Action: Review vaccination protocols with your vet, including the timing of pre-calving vaccinations, which are typically administered at least three weeks before calving.

5. Calving Sheds and Equipment

- Check Facilities: Ensure that all gates open and close easily, the calving jack and head gates are functional, and lighting is adequate.
- Calving Pen Setup: The calving area should be clean, well-bedded, and have an adequate clean water supply.
- Cleanliness is crucial for reducing disease transmission. Fresh bedding and clean pens are essential to avoid disease outbreaks.

Action: Make sure pens are well-ventilated with no draughts, as poor air circulation can lead to a buildup of pathogens that could affect both cows and calves. Maintain good hygiene practices to reduce pathogen exposure.



6. Colostrum Management Refresher

- **Importance of Colostrum:** A calf is born without immunity to disease, so it is reliant on gaining immunity from the antibodies in the colostrum it receives until their own immune system is fully functional. A calf's ability to absorb antibodies from colostrum decreases with time, so it's vital to provide the first feed of good quality colostrum, within 2 hours of birth. Aim for at least 3 litres. Invest in a refractometer to measure the quality of the colostrum being fed. Values greater than 22% represent good quality colostrum suitable for calves first feed.
- **Storage & Hygiene:** It is really important to harvest and store colostrum as hygienically as possible because when bacteria get into the colostrum they bind to the antibodies and the calf will be unable to absorb them. Store surplus colostrum by freezing it within 3 hours of collection at temperatures between -18°C and -25°C. Use warm water to thaw the colostrum. Avoid using microwaves or boiling water to thaw it as this can destroy antibodies.

Action: Have a clean, dry place to store colostrum, ideally a fridge, and ensure that it is collected as cleanly as possible. If not used within 48hours discard.



