BioSecure
Enhanced and cost-effective biosecurity in livestock production

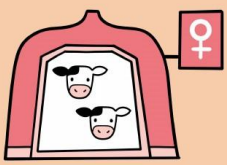
Utrecht University

PRACTICE ABSTRACT # 46

# Safe and welfare friendly housing of dairy calves

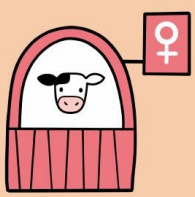
**On most dairy farms, calves are separated from their mothers shortly after birth, allowing the cow to rejoin the milking herd. Following separation, calves may be housed either in groups or individually. Individual housing for the first weeks or months of life has been recommended. However, research shows that group housing improves social development, feed intake and growth. Those housing systems should be managed correctly to optimize calf health and welfare.**

Effective calf management should integrate social housing with sound health and biosecurity practices. What are the key management measures that allow calves to benefit from social housing while maintaining high standards of health and biosecurity?



**Group or pair housing**

- Preferred housing method when no (disease) problems are encountered
- Create stable groups with calves of the same age (e.g., born within the same four days)
- Move them all together to the youngstock area
- If a calf is sick, isolate it from the group but keep visual contact



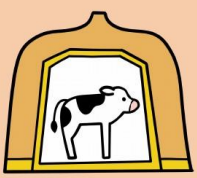
**Individual housing**

- Recommended for veterinary treatment, disease control or short-term management needs -> return to social compatible groups when possible
- At least ensure visual contact with other calves and tactile contact if there is no risk of disease transmission
- Make sure to always use the same bottle/buckets for the same calf

**What about dairy calves being moved off the farm for raising elsewhere?**

- Individual or group housing under the same conditions as the calves remaining on farm
- Ensure they can be picked up by the livestock trader from the 'dirty' side of your farm, without having contact with the other farm animals





**General recommendations**

- Ensure all the calves receive sufficient, good quality colostrum
- Hutches (individual or group) should be properly cleaned and disinfected before new calves enter
- Ensure that all calves intended for sale can be picked up from the 'dirty' side of the farm

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