

AD-LIB GROUPED HOUSED CALF FEEDING: KEYS TO SUCCESS

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- Remember the basics: colostrum, hygiene, etc.
- Stocking density- at least 30+ sq ft (3 m²) lying area per calf.
- Dry, dry bedding.
- “Plug them in.” Show them where the nipple is for the first few days. Watch gut fill as a gauge of intake (or automated feeder data).
- Excellent ventilation is critical! Take advantage of positive pressure ventilation systems (using the tubes that Nordlund has re-invented). Most barns just don’t have it right! Be aggressive. Remember air exchanges/hour. Watch for drafts.
- True ad-lib (don’t limit intakes)!
- Free choice water and calf starter grain is still important. Ad-lib fed calves will drink water.
- Age range- try and fill a pen in 7-10 days.
- Need to re-train yourself/employees on how to find calves in need (they never act hungry).
- Calves still need to be observed multiple times per day. Don’t forget about them!
- Cold milk (<75F) really discourages intakes. Offer milk at 85-90 degrees F.
- Proper pH is very important. Ideal range=4.0-4.2. Too low discourages intakes, too high allows for bacterial growth.
- Maintain consistent total solids. Monitor with Brix refractometer.
- Acidify cool milk (<75 degrees) to prevent curdling. Add diluted acid slowly while agitating.
- Concentrated acid is dangerous! Be careful.
- Make the system work for you!