

Unweaned Calf Housing



New Requirements for Calf Housing

Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC) has finalized new requirements for calf housing in the proAction® Animal Care module to align with recent updates to the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle (March 2023). As part of the process, DFC and provincial farmer organizations tested the requirements on a sample of farms across Canada. Farmers and other participants shared valuable feedback that shaped the final requirements.



Scan to visit the code on the NFACC website



The new requirements will be part of on-farm validations starting in April 2027, along with the full package of updates related to the Code of Practice.

What are the Requirements?

Requirements that apply to ANY housing for unweaned calves:



All calf housing must be designed and maintained in good condition to minimize injury and lameness.



Calves must be able to have visual contact with other cattle, stand up, lie down, turn completely around, stand fully upright without touching the top of the enclosure, adopt both sternal and lateral resting postures, and they must also be able to groom themselves.



Calves must have a resting surface with enough bedding to achieve insulation, dryness, comfort, traction, and cleanliness.



Housing must provide fresh air and prevent the buildup of harmful gases, dust and moisture, and reduce the risk of heat and cold stress.

When calves are group housed, the bedded area must be sufficient for all calves to lie down at the same time.

Calves must be able to have visual contact with other cattle, recognizing that cattle are herd animals and can become stressed when housed alone without visual stimulation. During extreme weather it is acceptable to temporarily block hutch doors for 3–5 days to protect calves, but additional monitoring is required.

Why is proAction requiring this?

The revisions strengthen the calf housing requirements in two important areas: social contact and comfort.

- Current scientific evidence demonstrates the health and welfare benefits of these new calf housing requirements.
- proAction has updated its requirements to align with the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle.

Definitions

Indoor housing is defined as housing that involves a roofed structure with four closable sides. Any calf hutches located under such a structure are considered indoor housed and must follow the indoor housing requirements.

Outdoor housing is defined as housing that does not involve a roofed structure with four closable sides. Hutches located under a roofed structure with less than four closable sides are considered outdoor housed and must follow the outdoor housing requirements.

Additional Requirements

Additional requirements specific to INDOOR housing for unweaned calves:



For indoor-housed calves, tethering is not permitted.



Farmers who do not already pair- or group-house calves must develop a plan to transition calves into pair- or group-housing by 2031.

Additional requirements specific to OUTDOOR housing for unweaned calves:



For outdoor-housed calves, tethering is permitted, but calves must be able to have physical contact with other calves, have access to an area out of the hutch, and have a collar.

What Does This Look Like On-Farm?

Pairing or grouping should be done with calves of similar size and age, and farms are encouraged to use an "all-in/all-out" group management system to reduce disease transmission. Housing areas should be cleaned and disinfected between groups. There are temporary exceptions for calves that are not healthy or thriving, for situations where separating a calf benefits recovery, or when compatible group mates are not available. For those farms not already pairing or grouping calves, farmers should work with their advisors to develop transition plans applicable for their specific facilities, conditions and management styles.

For outdoor-housed calves, tethering remains an acceptable option only when calves have access to sufficient outdoor space, such that their entire body can be outside the hutch; a small opening that allows only the head and neck out is not acceptable. Collars must be appropriate and must not be made from chain, wire, or baler twine. Buddy hutches may be used but calves must have access to an area outside the hutch. Outdoor-housed calves must always have the opportunity for nose-to-nose physical contact with other calves at minimum, although temporary separation is permitted when necessary for health, safety, or protection from severe weather. Other temporary housing adjustments can be made during inclement weather conditions to protect calves (e.g. moving calf hutches into a coverall barn) without indoor housing requirements applying.



For additional information on these requirements, contact your Provincial Coordinator.



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