

PLANNING FOR SURPLUS CALVES

Version 1. 31 March 2020

As COVID-19 related travel and physical distancing restrictions come into effect, there is a need to prepare for the possibility that normal dairy calf sales and pick up of surplus calves may stop in your area.

Don't get caught out – **plan ahead** for how you will manage these calves.

What are your options locally?

Normal options for selling calves vary from region to region but may change with additional closures. Some calf sales have already stopped, and calf pick-up from farm may be limited in the future. The main options are to **sell**, **rear** extra calves or if no other options, **euthanase**.

Selling calves

- If your normal calf sale is closed, is there a calf buyer or an abattoir that accepts direct consignments from farms operating in your region?
- Are there local calf rearers you can organise in advance to take calves? Remember to fulfil NLIS requirements.
- Note that calves need to be 5 days old, fit and healthy to be sold off farm.
- Calf transporters can reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread between farms by:
 - Using disposable gloves at each farm and disposing of them on departure
 - Ensuring antibacterial spray is in each truck and at farm pickup point
 - Wiping down all hand contact surfaces and touch points prior to leaving each farm
 - Maintaining social distancing (1.5m)

Rearing extra calves

To ensure the welfare of all calves reared, consider:

- **Space** - do you have enough room in your calf rearing areas? Newborn calves need at least 1.5–2m² each. At least 2.5m² each is required for older calves.
- **Labour** – do you have the required number of people to rear the extra calves?
- **Equipment** – will you need extra feeders and teats?
- **Feed** – can you access and budget for extra milk powder, calf grain and forage?

- **Bedding** – can you access and budget for the extra bedding material required?

Some farmers successfully rear multiple calves on cows (e.g. high cell count cows who might otherwise be culled). Consideration should be given to managing both colostrum intake and the risk of Bovine Johne's Disease in these situations.

Euthanasia

If all other options are exhausted, you may consider euthanising the calves. If performed in a way that ensures a rapid loss of consciousness quickly followed by death, the welfare of the calf is not compromised. However, this is ethically challenging for many people in the community, including staff.

If considering this option:

- Use a captive bolt or a rifle. Blunt force trauma can only be used in calves that are less than 24 hours of age *and* the calf is in severe pain or distress *and* there is no other practical alternative.
- Access the guide to emergency euthanasia [here](#).
- Use the 5 finger head check to confirm death. Check that there is no tongue tone, jaw tone, blink reflex, that the pupils are dilated and there is no breathing at 5 minutes.
- Give yourself, or others performing this task, time and mental space – taking an animal's life can be challenging.
- Think about disposal. Is there still knackery pick up, or will you need to compost or bury? Check with your local council to ensure you fulfil requirements for appropriate disposal of stock on farm.

Useful links

dairyaustralia.com.au

[Caring for bobby calves](#) factsheet

[Rearing healthy calves](#) manual

dairyaustralia.com.au/c19

[Preventing the spread of COVID-19 during service](#)

[provider visits](#) factsheet

[Farm biosecurity](#) factsheet