



DAIRY SOLUTIONS

Cold Weather Calf Care: Strategies to Keep Young Calves Thriving

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With a very chilly 10-day forecast looming for most of us in the Upper Midwest, below is a reminder of strategies to help young calves thrive during the cold snap.

Nutritional Management Strategies: Routine, Routine, Routine

Consistency is key.

- Provide more nutrition to meet the calf's increased energy needs in cold weather.
- **Feed more milk at a consistent solids rate.** Consider increasing the daily milk volume by adding a third feeding or increasing each feeding by 0.5–1.0 quart of milk replacer solution.
- Feeding more milk is the most efficient way to increase the calf's available energy and calories.
- Use **Milk Energizer** (a 60% fat product) during the first 2–3 weeks of life. Adding it to the milk ration helps meet the elevated energy requirements during cold weather.
 - **Rule of thumb:** 1 oz of Milk Energizer provides about **10°F of added warmth** for the calf.

Environmental Management Strategies: Clean & Dry, Clean & Dry, Clean & Dry

- **Dry newborn calves** with a clean towel after birth and fluff their hair coat to aid thermoregulation.
- **Use calf jackets.** Once dry, put a calf jacket on. In extreme cold, **consider two jackets**, especially for small, lethargic, or unthrifty calves.
 - **Rule of thumb:** A calf jacket provides **20°F of added warmth**.
 - Keep jackets on calves for **at least the first 3 weeks of life**, longer if necessary. Calves less than 21 days old have very high maintenance energy requirements- we want to give them the best start we can.
 - Only remove jackets when calves are eating ample calf starter and the weather is mild. Removing jackets during a cold snap can cause unnecessary stress.
- **Provide ample, clean straw bedding.** There should be enough bedding that when the calf is lying down, you **cannot see her legs**.
- **Ensure access to clean, fresh calf starter and water at all times.**
 - Calves can handle the cold when they consume enough calf starter.
 - **Remember:** It takes **4 lbs of fresh water** to digest and metabolize **1 lb of dry matter**. Water consumption drives calf starter intake, and vice versa.
- **Keep pens/hutches clean.**
- **Maintain and sanitize milk feeding equipment properly.**
 - Clean and sanitize all milk feeding equipment **after each use**.