

Calf Jacket Protocol: A good example for a farm to develop their own protocol

[From Jamie Robertson, LMS, tweeted by Synergy Farm Health Calf Club on November 27, 2017, reproduced by Sam Leadley smleadley@yahoo.com]

The requirement for additional energy management in a calf house varies according to the calf/calves, the weather, and the quality of calf house environment. In the first week of life a calf is likely to spend extra energy to keep “warm” below an air temperature of maybe 10°C [50°F]. The actual lower critical temperature for any one calf will depend on all those aspects that will influence the energy dynamics of the system.

1. Genetics - Jersey calf will feel “cold” before e.g. Charolais calf
2. Birth conditions - normal/prolonged, premature//low birth weight, single/twin
3. Health - vigour/health vs apathetic/low feed intake
4. Nutrition - quality and quantity and timing of colostrum, energy density and Dilution of milk powder, adequate intake
5. Air speed - less than 1m/s [3.3feet/s] is good; a draft is negative
6. Dry bedding - essential, damp bedding extracts energy from the calf

Calf Jacket Protocol

Jackets must be made of breathable materials.

1. Locate max/min thermometer in calf house.
2. Reset thermometer every morning during autumn/winter housing.
3. Decide on set temperature for your system (e.g., 10°C, 50°F).
4. Agree starting protocol with staff (e.g., 3 consecutive night-time minimum temperatures below 10°C, 50°F).
5. Calves must be dried off before using jacket.
6. Place clean jacket on every calf below one week of age and on entry to calf house.

Removing jackets: Entirely dependent on energy dynamics listed above, what is the condition and appetite of each calf? What are the expected weather conditions? Or, keep on calf until 4 weeks old.

1. Know the weather forecast, steady or rising temperatures OK, falling temperatures, beware removing jacket too early.
2. Agree with staff a temperature protocol for healthy calves (e.g., one week old >10°C, 50°F, two week >5°C, 41°F, more than 3 week >2°C, 36°F OK)
3. Refer to recent night-time minimum temperatures.
4. Consider individual calf condition, feed intake, health, growth rate.
5. Remove jacket in morning, not afternoon.
6. Remove dirt from jacket with hose/light power wash or pre-soak.
7. Wash jacket @ 40-50°C, 104-122°F with detergent and dry.