

# The real causes of pneumonia

### MICHAEL SEXTON

This autumn, the fine weather gifted us the unexpected bonus of an extended grazing season, which meant that housing was delayed and all that goes with it.

The most important disease associated with housing is pneumonia.

Draughts are the major contributing factor for pneumonia in that they chill the calf. This in turn means the affected calf has to burn up more body fat in order to keep it at an ambient temperature, which, over time, results in reduced body fat (which acts as an insulator

for the calf).

Such calves are then more likely to succumb to viruses and bacterial infections. The most effective way to minimise exposure to draughts is to sheet calf pen gates to help prevent cold air sweeping through the pens. Canopies are an excellent way to mitigate against down draughts.

### **Air temperature**

Where pneumonia outbreaks occur, many of the calf houses are too cold. The housing requirements of older cattle (fattening) are very different to those for calves.

Sweating is a specific con-

cern with big cattle, thus the desire to give such cattle plenty of air. Calves, on the other hand, do not readily generate body heat. This can be exacerbated should calves be housed in sheds with big open spaces, as it is nearly impossible for calves to warm up in such housing via their own body heat.

This results in a cold house syndrome, leading to calves developing chills and subsequently pneumonia.

### **Air circulation**

While draughts are to be avoided, stale air is something to watch out for. The best indicator for this is the smell of urine.

In an ideal calf house, fresh air should come in from the sides of the shed, above the height of the calves, and stale air should leave by the centre ridge point of the roof, or some other high point.

### **Bedding**

Cattle that lie on a dry bed are less likely to get cold than those that lie on damp beds or beds where the bedding isn't refreshed often enough.

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