

Management of the suckler calf at weaning

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As the end of the year approaches, suckler farmers need to look at weaning protocols and strategies.

Weaning is the most stressful time in a beef animal's life and it is important to keep this process as smooth as possible.

Weaning stress can have adverse effects on the immune system, leading to lack of thrive and disease, in particular pneumonia.

Therefore, it is important to have the calves as healthy as possible prior to weaning.

By assessing and targeting some key areas, farmers can reduce this stress and maintain

a good daily liveweight gain.

A good deworming protocol is essential for optimum health and performance, as a burden of worms stresses the immune system.

A white drench two weeks prior to weaning is advisable.

Other stresses on the animal, such as dehorning and castration should be avoided at this time.

In order to maintain a good daily weight gain, farmers are advised to creep-feed their calves a month before weaning.

This will reduce the dramatic change in gut flora and thereby lower the risk of acidosis scour.

The majority of weaning stress comes from the separa-

tion of the calf and the cow and breaking the maternal bond.

By keeping cows and calves close to one another, but preventing the calves from drinking, we reduce the initial shock of separation.

Pneumonia outbreaks

Last, but certainly not least, is the persistent fight against pneumonia outbreaks at this time.

There are seven potential pathogens that can cause pneumonia. Thus, knowing which pathogens are on your farm is the key to a good vaccination protocol.

With regards to housing, the two key factors are space and

ventilation.

If these are inadequate, it is recommended to practice batch weaning rather than overcrowding a shed in one go, as this will increase the risk of an outbreak.

To discuss any further queries, contact your local vet.

Padraig Finnan works at Glen Veterinary Clinic, Clonmel Rd, Tipperary. Glen Vet Clinic is part of XLVets. XLVets is a group of progressive practices who are working together to achieve a better future for agriculture and veterinary in Ireland. Visit www.xlvet.ie.