Agricultural Extension Service ● University of Minnesota

FACT SHEET

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Portable Calf Hutch

Calves need a healthy environment. Overcrowded, poorly ventilated, and damp housing can cause calf losses. However, even when good facilities are available, housing alternatives may be desirable:

—to prevent overcrowding during the calving season; and
—to permit complete evacuation to clean, disinfect, and air out other facilities.

Calf housing on Minnesota dairy farms frequently has inadequate ventilation and overcrowded conditions, with animals of different ages sharing the same facilities. Together, these factors often result in a high incidence of pneumonia and scours.

These problems have practical solutions. One is to build a calf barn. Publication M-149, "30' x 44' Insulated Calf Barn with Individual and Group Pens" provides detailed plans and a materials list. This is a publication of the University of Minnesota Agricultural Extension Service available from your county extension agent.

A second approach is to use portable calf hutches. These have advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages include:

*low cost;
*easy cleaning and disinfection, taking advantage of rainfall and sunshine;
*convenient relocation away from contaminated soil;
*natural ventilation;
*isolation, decreasing spread of disease among calves;
*calf acclimation to existing weather conditions, preparing the calf for minimal housing facilities; and
*easy removal of manure, using a tractor scraper and loader.

Disadvantages are:

*possible increased labor costs, depending on hutch proximity to milk, feed, and bedding supplies;
*disagreeable chore requirements during inclement weather; and
*more bedding is required to prevent chilling.

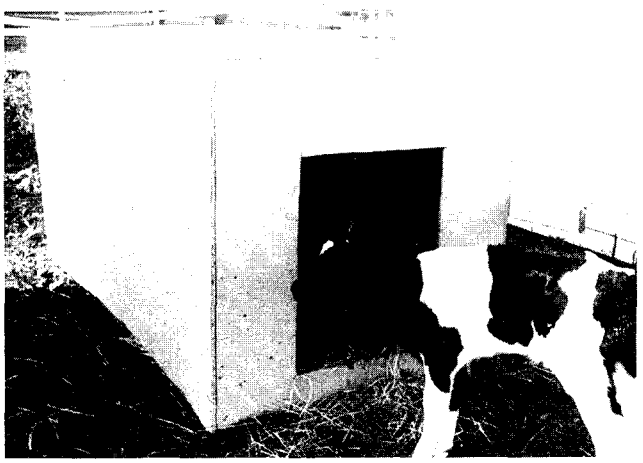
Many different styles of hutches can be used in the northern United States. Some are more economical to build than others, but these are frequently less convenient or less permanent. Several different styles are presented here.

Hutch 1—the economical approach

This hutch utilizes four sheets of 5/8-inch exterior plywood (4 feet x 8 feet), 12 "L"-shaped metal corners, and 24 stove bolts. No interior frame is required.

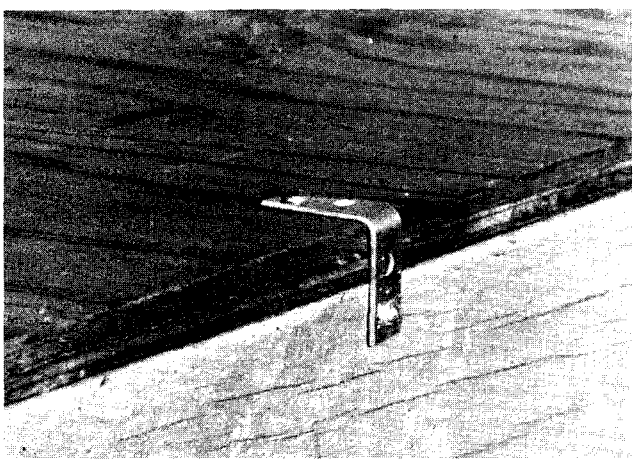
Because three of the four plywood sheets remain uncut, salvage value is considerable if the hutch is no longer needed. Entry to feed and water buckets may be more difficult because the only entry is a 2- by 2½-foot opening for the calf.

Two of the 4- x 8-foot plywood sheets are the sides. A third sheet is the top. A fourth sheet is cut into two pieces, each 3 feet and 10-3/4 inches wide and 3 feet and 11-3/8 inches high. An opening, 2 x 3¼ feet is cut in the center of one of the pieces. This opening is cut so the calf must step over a 6-inch piece of plywood to enter the hutch. This provides more strength to the structure and helps retain the bedding.



Hutch 1 does not require an interior support frame.

Here is how to secure the top and sides of Hutch 1.



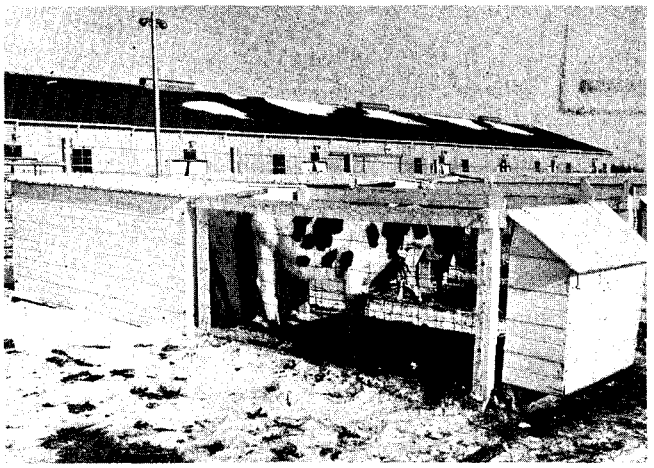
Hutch 2—a more permanent hutch

This hutch is also 4-feet wide and can be either 6 or 8 feet deep. The roof is pitched slightly to shed water, and one half is hinged. This makes it easier to clean, provides increased summer ventilation, and allows sunlight to dry out the hutch after cleaning.

Feed and water buckets can be secured in each back corner or in a covered feeder at the opposite end of a fenced runway.

A canvas tarpaulin may be hung in the opening to provide additional weather protection.

If a board fence is preferred, every other side panel of the hutch may be extended 6 to 8 feet to create a fence along the sides of the exercise pen.



Hutch 2 has a pitched-roof and wire-fenced enclosure.

Hutch 3—metal hutch

The hutch shown here is only 3 feet x 5 feet. Its use may be limited during extreme cold. This is because of the metal's low insulation value and the hutch's small size. Another disadvantage is rust.

This hutch, however, has several advantages, including:

*easier cleaning and more thorough disinfection;
*the sloped roof which drains water away from the calf's exercise area;
*the hinged roof, which controls summer air movement;
*the 4-foot height at the front and 3½-foot height at the rear, which allows rear access to water and grain buckets; and
*ease of changing direction of the opening (downwind during cold or rainy seasons, away from the sun in summer to provide shade).

Other considerations

1. Secure each type of hutch so both hutch and calf aren't moved by winds. Hutches may be tied down by a J-shaped stake driven into the soil at one or more corners or by stretching a wire over the top, anchored by stakes on both sides.

2. The calf may be confined either by fencing or tethering. A small, individual exercise area may be fenced using either wood or woven fencing. Heavy gage woven wire attached at each front corner of the hutch can be used to form a circular enclosure. Permanent posts won't be needed.

Calves may be tethered to a 6-foot chain attached to the hutch near the hutch opening (near ground level). Put a collar around the calf's neck to attach the chain. A double-swivel chain helps prevent excessive twisting. This allows complete access to the hutch and limits the calf to about 10 feet around the hutch opening. It also trains the calf to respect confinement and helps halter break it. Tethering, however, increases the danger of attack from dogs and coyotes.

3. Calves should be dry before being placed into a calf hutch. Place enough bedding inside the hutch to protect the calf from frozen or damp soil. A base of ground corncobs topped with a liberal amount of straw works well.

4. Hutches should be located on high ground to avoid flooding. Place the hutches downwind of a grove of trees or other windbreak to provide additional weather protection.

These are examples of hutch 3, a metal hutch.

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