

3.2 Best practice for bobby calves

Tight budgets are going to make this calving a difficult and stressful time but we can not afford to let our high standards slip.

The bobby calf best practice guidelines were developed in late 2007 and were distributed before calving last season. They are coming out again with information on humane slaughter for you to read and to train any staff working with calves. We know many of these posters go up on the calf shed wall as a reference, if you haven't put it up it's a good idea to do so.

We don't want any farmers to end up facing the penalties for failing to meet the welfare needs of animals, including bobby calves. It is essential that everyone handling your stock, including your temporary workers and contractors, is aware of these requirements and meets them at all times so you comply with the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act 1999.

Here are some practical considerations for you to reinforce on your farm:

Selecting bobby calves for transport

Bobby calves going to slaughter must:

- Be at least 4 days old
- Be healthy, with no visible disease (e.g. scours), deformity, injury, blindness or disability
- Have bright eyes and upright ears
- Be strong, able to rise from a lying position unassisted, move freely around the pen and bear weight on all four limbs
- Have firm hooves on which the soles show wear (indicating that they have been mobile)
- Have a dry and withered navel.

Make it easy for the truck driver

- Calves should be individually assessed for fitness to transport. Unfit animals must be withheld until fit, or humanely destroyed
- A raised pen (70-100cm) off the ground should be used to hold calves before transport
- Where possible, assist the truck driver with loading the animals. Not only does this make the job easier, it enables you to ensure the animals are loaded correctly
- Calves should be fed as close to transport as possible and no more than 2 hours before pick-up.

Other things for you to consider:

Any unfit or unwanted calves must be destroyed humanely. The preferred option for humane destruction is a shot to the middle of the head, above the eyes with a .22 rifle or other suitable firearm, from a distance of 5-25cm from the target.

Calling in a professional slaughterman is a good option if you or your staff do not hold a firearms licence. Use of a blunt object is to be avoided if possible.

If calves are dispatched using a captive bolt gun or a blunt object, it is crucial that whoever is doing the job is well trained and has the strength to do the job effectively, and that the animal is bled out.

It is also common sense that practices that have the potential to cause upset and public concern, i.e. humane destruction and storage of dead animals for collection, should be out of sight of the public to avoid causing unnecessary alarm or distress to passers-by.

Refer to FarmFact 3-16 on www.dairynz.co.nz for information on dead stock disposal or contact your local council for any specific requirements in your region.

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