

Cattle Producer's Handbook

Management Section

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Protective Shelters for Beef Calves

Bob Loucks and Fred Edmiston, Extension County Educators
University of Idaho

Beef calves are often born under adverse conditions during late winter or early spring. Cold temperatures, strong winds, and excessive moisture place these calves in a stress situation. Often little opportunity exists to provide natural shelter to reduce this stress.

Exposure of young calves to severe cold temperatures for extended periods of time causes depression, physical weakness, reluctance or inability to nurse, difficulty in maintenance of normal body temperature, and eventual coma and death. Also, stress from chilling reduces the concentration of several blood constituents and white blood cells that normally aid the animals in resistance to disease. Practices such as bedding the wind-protected side of brushy fence-rows or other natural or artificial windbreaks help calves maintain their body temperature and have been shown to reduce the incidence and death loss from calf scours and pneumonia.

University of Idaho Calf Shelter

Ranches with little or no natural wind protection may consider constructing protective shelters. Fig. 1 shows the University of Idaho calf shelter design. This 8x8 foot shelter is readily constructed from plywood. The shelter does not have a floor. It is designed to accommodate 10 calves. The front opening of the shelter is large

enough to allow calves to enter and leave at will but is too small for cows to enter.

A sufficient number of shelters should be constructed to house the amount of calves expected on the site. The shelters should be placed near the feeding area to minimize the distance between the nursing area and the shelter area. The open front of the shelters should face in a direction opposite the prevailing winds or storms. Shelters are usually placed in parallel rows in an area that is well drained.

Dry, clean bedding should be added to each shelter. As bedding becomes soiled and wet, each shelter should be moved to a dry location and fresh bedding added. In areas of deep or packed snow shelters should be located in a well drained and bladed area in anticipation of the spring thaw.

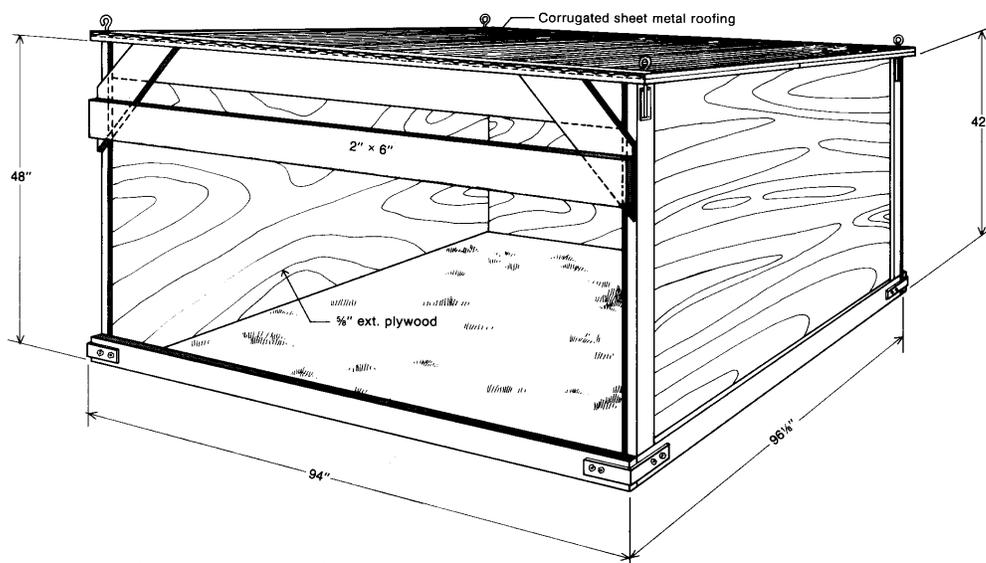


Fig. 1. The University of Idaho calf shelter.