Dairy Calf Rearer

Dairy farming

Job title	Dairy Calf Rearer
Department	Dairy farming
Reports to	Herd Manager (or Youngstock Supervisor on larger units)
Direct reports	None
Location	*[To be confirmed by the employer]*
Contract type	*[Permanent / fixed-term / other]*
Salary and benefits	*[To be confirmed by the employer]*

Job purpose

Looks after calves from birth to weaning and beyond. Gives colostrum, feeds milk, keeps pens clean and dry, checks calf health and treats problems under the farm protocol, weighs calves against growth targets, weans them and keeps accurate records. Every heifer calf reared well is the start of a future milking cow.

Key responsibilities

Feeding and colostrum

- Give every newborn calf good-quality colostrum as soon as possible after birth, ideally within two hours
- Test colostrum quality where the farm does, and store or freeze spare colostrum clearly labelled
- Feed milk or milk replacer at the right temperature, volume and times set out in the farm feeding plan
- Mix milk replacer accurately, weighing the powder and checking the water temperature
- Give clean fresh water and calf starter feed from the first days of life
- Set up and check automatic calf feeders where used, and look for calves that are not drinking
- Record every feed and any refusal on the same day

Housing and hygiene

- Wash and sanitise feeders, buckets, teats and mixing equipment after every feed
- Keep pens deep bedded, dry and free of draughts at calf level, with good ventilation above
- Clean out and disinfect pens and hutches between batches and let them dry before the next calves arrive
- Keep the milk kitchen, feed store and passages clean and tidy
- Follow the biosecurity rules between the calf unit and the milking herd, including boots, clothing and equipment
- Check water troughs, feeders and gates daily and report faults

Calf health and welfare

- Check every calf at every feed, and at least twice a day, for scours, pneumonia, navel ill and other problems, and act early
- Treat sick calves under the farm health plan and the vet instructions, and isolate them where needed

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- Dip navels and tag calves soon after birth
- Disbud calves only when trained, with pain relief and local anaesthetic as required where the job is based
- Give vaccinations as the vet plan says and record them
- Handle calves calmly and gently at all times
- Report deaths and repeated health problems to the Herd Manager straight away

Weaning, growth and records

- Weigh calves at set points and record growth against the farm targets
- Wean calves by weight and starter intake, not by age alone, stepping milk down gradually
- Move calves from single pens to group housing, and on to heifer groups, with as little stress as possible
- Record births, treatments, withdrawal periods, weights and movements on the same day
- Keep the medicine book up to date and store medicines as the label says
- Tell the Herd Manager about any calf that is falling behind and about any rise in losses or illness

Qualifications and experience

Essential

- Practical experience with calves or other livestock
- Able to spot a sick calf early and act on it
- Willingness to work early starts and a weekend rota, outdoors in all weathers
- Careful with hygiene and with records
- Works safely around cattle

Desirable

- Level 2 or 3 qualification in agriculture or animal care
- Calf-rearing or youngstock training course
- Disbudding training
- Veterinary medicines handling training
- Telehandler or tractor certificates as required where the job is based
- Experience with automatic calf feeders

Skills and attributes

- Patience and attention with young animals
- Attention to detail
- Hygiene discipline
- Reliability
- Teamwork
- Calm, gentle handling

Measures of success

- Calf losses within target
- Scours and pneumonia cases falling
- Growth rates and weaning weights on target
- Colostrum given on time and recorded for every calf
- Pens and feeding equipment clean
- Records complete and up to date
- No accidents or injuries

Working conditions and safety

Early starts and seven-day care of the calves, with a weekend rota. The work is in calf sheds and outdoor hutches in all weathers and involves lifting and carrying feed, bedding and calves, long periods on your feet,

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and contact with slurry and disinfectants, with a risk of infections that pass from calves to people, so hand hygiene matters; PPE and training are provided. Accommodation is sometimes offered.

- Follow health and safety rules and safe systems of work, and wear the correct PPE
- Follow animal welfare, biosecurity and medicine-use procedures at all times
- Report hazards, accidents, near misses and concerns promptly

This job description outlines the main duties of the role. It is not a complete list, and the employer may update it as the business changes, in consultation with the jobholder.

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