

BY DESIGN

Calving facilities

by Katy Lippolis, Iowa State University

As we get closer to calving season, it's time to make sure our facilities are prepared. In many instances, deciding to calve in a barn can be advantageous in several ways.

Newborn calves have difficulty maintaining body temperature, and calving in cold and/or muddy conditions can lead to significant sickness and mortality. After difficult births, calves are often weak for several days and require additional care to ensure healthy recovery. Therefore, providing a facility to get calves out of the cold and offer additional bedding and assistance can help prevent calf losses in harsh conditions.

Further, first-calf heifers and second-calf cows may require more watching and assistance than mature cows. Bringing in these females to a facility that allows for quick and improved assistance can decrease labor requirements and improve calf health, as dystocias can be detected and aided quickly. Lastly, these

facilities offer the potential for installing calving cameras, close-by calving supply rooms, and hospital areas to help make your calving season go as smoothly as possible.

When designing the calving barn, plan a way to make sure pens are easy to clean, cattle are easily maneuvered, and that makes it easy to provide assistance if necessary.

Diagrams for two calving barns are included that offer these components. Multiple pens allow for separating cows close to calving for closer watch, providing individual calving areas, separating new pairs, and the potential to incorporate a modified Sandhills Calving System for clean calving areas.

Alleys that lead to a headgate adjacent to pens increase ease of pulling cows in need of calving assistance. Make sure to include a swinging gate if possible behind the headgate to improve access behind the cow, as well as room for her to lie down if necessary. Additionally, a

concrete pad in the assistance area can be used for easy cleaning between animals and to improve sanitation.

Make sure pens are stripped regularly of bedding material used, as calving areas should be kept as clean as possible to decrease pathogen exposure of newborn calves. Incorporating a scours vaccine in your vaccination program may also be advantageous in these facilities.

Following calving,

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Fig. 1: Calving shed, open front
Suitable in milder climates for 20-50 cows

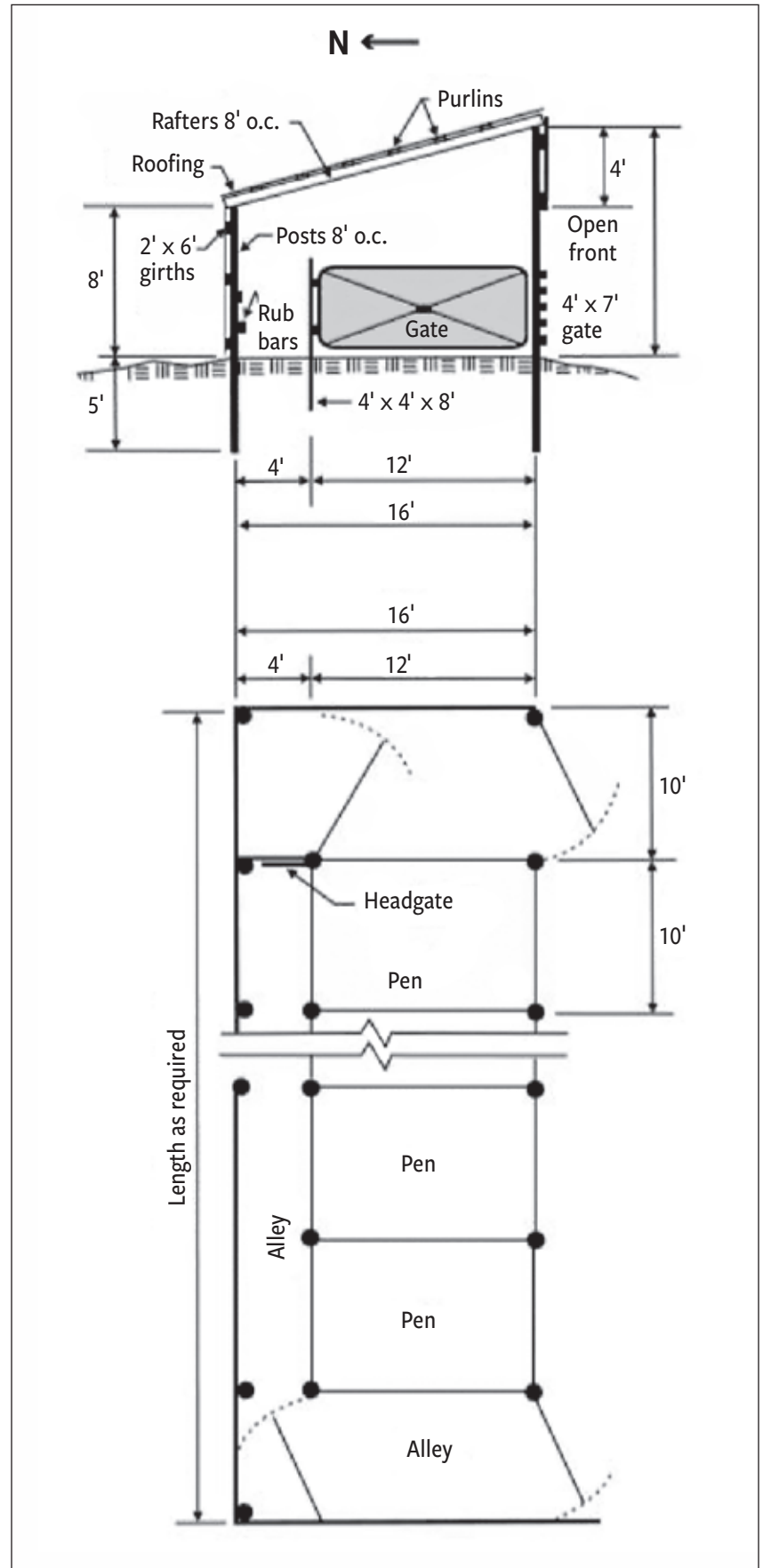


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move new pairs to a pen away from pregnant cows, to allow for better attention to newborn calves and lessen the risk of calf stealing. The first few days after birth are critical to newborn calf health, and calves should be monitored closely during this time.

For more information regarding calving and calf health, visit the

Calving Manual at the Iowa Beef Center website: <http://www.iowabeefcenter.org>. |

Editor's note: "By Design" is a regular column of the *Angus Beef Bulletin* featuring facility and homestead design for cattlemen. Katy Lippolis is an Extension beef cow-calf specialist at Iowa State University. Diagrams courtesy of *Cow-Calf Production in the U.S. Corn Belt*, available at www-mwps.sws.iastate.edu.

Fig. 2: Calving barn, enclosed

Suitable for severe climates for large herds (100+ cows). Swing-away bottom side gate in treatment stall allows for nursing.

