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*Bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV)

CASE STUDY 1

The Tudors UPPER HOUSE FARM, NEAR SHREWSBURY

An eye for detail is vital for rearing healthy calves

The Tudor family, who rear for Blade Farming, aim for a smooth transition for calves that pass through the farm near Shrewsbury



Alan (second from left) and Louise Tudor (second from right) keep a close eye on the calves to flag up any potential problems.

*** Health and welfare are the building blocks of any good housing system. When you have 2500 youngstock passing through your sheds each year, spending just 12 weeks on the farm, they are absolutely critical.**

The Tudor family, at Upper House Farm, near Shrewsbury, rear black-and-white, continental cross and Angus calves for Blade Farming, which arrive at 2-3 weeks and leave at 14 weeks. In that time they are looking to more than double their liveweight. That's on top of being weaned, vaccinated, wormed and dehorned.

"They come in from all over the country and are in and out quite quickly. We need to make sure their stay with us goes as smoothly as possible," says Louise

Tudor, who runs the family unit with her father-in-law Alan. The first consideration is to ensure they are healthy. Sheds are disinfected ready for the new arrivals. The calves are wormed, vaccinated and treated for external parasites as soon as they are on farm, with a booster vaccine given six weeks later.

Dehorning also takes place on

*** WE NEED TO MAKE SURE THEIR STAY WITH US GOES AS SMOOTHLY AS POSSIBLE**

Louise Tudor

arrival. "It seems like we're giving them an awful lot of stress. But we find it's best to sort them out on arrival, then leave them relatively undisturbed for at least three weeks."

A key part of the arrival routine is to sort the calves into groups of a similar size. "This is important and makes such a difference to the way they settle down in their groups and ensures less bullying."

In the milk sheds, 6mm weaning pellets are provided from day one in troughs, alongside the ad-lib milk machines. "These are mixed with straw and molasses – it's important to get fibre into their system to develop the rumen. The mix is carefully balanced to get meat on their backs and not allow them to get pot-bellied."

The calves take well to the

mix, says Ms Tudor, and there's no change of feed with an intake of about 2.5kg a head a day by the time they are weaned. "They stay on it all the way through to ensure a consistent diet."

The design of the milk and weaning sheds is also a key part of ensuring the calves have a smooth passage through the farm. They are kept in groups of 10-12 in one new purpose-built shed in pens of 15ft by 20ft, and slightly larger groups of 15-20 in a converted shed of 15ft by 40ft pens.

"The main thing through the sheds is airflow. It wants to be airy but not draughty. We also keep them as dry as we can – humidity is a big disease issue." The beds are littered down every day and the sheds lie on a slope with seepage drained off to a tank.

A good handling system ensures minimum stress, she says. "They're not being handled for long – 30 seconds and they're vaccinated and out."

The rest is just down to pure good husbandry. "It's the importance of looking over them every morning and spotting any problems early on. Father-in-law always reckons I can spot a calf that's going down 24 hours before anyone else."

A final vaccine and it's a healthy calf in peak condition that's sold on for finishing. Although the calves are contract-reared, the Tudors are buying back some for finishing themselves. "We're looking to build this side up to 400 by the end of the year," says Ms Tudor.



TIM SCHWENNER

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