

## UNIT : THE CALF – REARING SYSTEMS

### INTRODUCTION

A number of options are available depending on the

- Origin of the calf
  - Dairy herd – largely artificially reared - occasionally naturally reared on a cow that is not its own mother
    - Adopted
    - Multi-suckled
  - Beef herd – naturally reared on its own mother - with or without other calves
- Rearing system practiced
  - Artificial rearing system – the calves are initially reared indoors, usually on a straw bedded floor and are weaned after as little as 5 weeks from birth, the system encouraging calves to eat dry feed as early in life as possible. Depending on the time of year when they are born, they will normally remain indoors for anywhere between 3 and 12 months – calves reared for cereal beef systems will remain housed from birth to slaughter
    - Individual – calves are individually penned and usually bucket reared on milk replacer until weaning
    - Group – several calves are penned together and fed milk replacer from a communal trough or teat-based feeder or have ad libitum access to an automatic machine that mixes and dispenses the milk
  - Natural rearing system – the calves are reared on their own mother or a ‘nurse’ cow and will be reared indoors or outdoors depending on the time of year born and the system practiced. They are normally weaned at 6 to 9 months of age but multiple suckled calves may be reared in batches of 2, 3 or 4 on a cow and weaned when they are between 5 and 12 weeks of age to be replaced by the next batch, a cow rearing several batches of calves in a lactation
    - Single suckled – calves suckle their birth mother and often spend a large proportion of this period outdoors before being weaned at 6 to 9 months of age

- Double / multiple suckled – other than for double suckling systems, the calves are normally housed during the rearing period and gain access to the cow to suckle twice a day, the cow being housed separately or turned out to grass and brought in for suckling

#### AIMS

To produce a calf that is :

- Healthy
- Well fed
- Kept to high welfare standards
- Disbudded, castrated, vaccinated etc at the appropriate ages