

Calves and Bicycle Wheels

[Part 3 of a six-part series]

In a short provocative article Ryan Leiterman and Lorrie Meister (Crystal Creek Natural) make the case for considering every aspect of calf care (the spokes in the bicycle wheel) to optimize calf health and growth. A perfectly round wheel depends on all spokes being strong. When one or more of six key spokes become weak the chances of delivering well-grown, healthy calves goes down.

Let's look at spoke Number 3 - Bedding

The authors recommend evaluating the strength of this “spoke” using

- Nesting Score
- Knee Test

If you are not using both of these methods to evaluate your housing management program the risk of a weak “spoke” may be high. The original article (link below) includes “nesting score” pictures that may be helpful – especially in judging bedding depth. For estimating the need for bedding straw the authors suggest 25 pounds of straw for every 1,000 pounds calf body weight per day. In western New York State, I have always used November through April as the “heavy bedding” season.

I recommend:

- If available, use long-stem straw (vs. chopped) to bed to achieve a nesting score of 3.
- For a discussion of cold weather bedding for calves, click [HERE](#) or use this URL <http://atticacows.com/library/newsletters/ColdWeatherBeddingN19161.pdf>.

Reference: “Calves and bicycle wheels: A systematic approach to troubleshooting pre-weaned calves” by Ryan Leiterman and Lorrie Meister. Click [HERE](#) to go to the article or use this URL <https://crystalcreeknatural.com/comparing-calves-to-bicycle-wheels-a-systematic-approach-to-troubleshooting-pre-weaned-calves/#more-8192>.