

“Nesting ” for Improved Calf Respiratory Health

As the temperature drops, make sure your calves keep warm with a deeply bedded resting surface. With a thermo neutral zone of 50-78°F (10-26°C) for newborn calves, it is critical they have a sufficient amount of bedding so that they can “nest,” preserving body heat for growth and immune system support. Evaluate bedding visually using the Nesting Score (NS), based upon the visibility of the rear leg of a calf lying down (see photos below).

If the leg is completely obscured by World Dairy Expo-style deep bedding, you’ve achieved NS3. Another way to get a NS3 is to have a moderate amount of bedding plus a calf jacket. In our research, a model of NS by incidence of respiratory disease in calf barns and airborne bacterial concentration showed a ~28% point improvement in respiratory disease NS3 calf barns vs. NS1 barns and ~22% point improvement vs. NS2 barns.

Increased barn air temperature was associated with increased airborne bacterial counts, which was associated with increased incidence of respiratory disease



NS1 Legs entirely visible lying down



NS2 Legs partially visible when lying down

