



BILLINGS FARM & MUSEUM

BABY FARM ANIMAL CELEBRATION: CURIOUS ABOUT CALVES?

At Billings Farm we almost always have at least one Jersey calf in our nursery. That's because we are a dairy farm, and our cows need to have a baby before they make milk. This time of year, we have a lot of calves in the nursery!

A cow's pregnancy lasts about 9 months and 10 days. When a calf is born, it usually weighs around 45 pounds and can stand and walk within an hour. Our calves are moved into the nursery shortly after they are born, so our farmers can look after and care for them closely. A calf's mom makes about 5-6 gallons of milk per day, and a calf drinks less than a gallon—so they are much less likely to drink too much milk and get sick in our nursery. In the nursery, they are kept in individual pens so that they stay healthy and safe until they are ready to be weaned (taken off their bottle) at about 3 months old.

Just like people, calves have a lot of learning to do when they are young. Once they are weaned, they're moved into a bigger pen with other calves. This is when the calves learn to share, get along with each other, and use the water fountain system. Calves learn better from other calves than they do from people. Our farmers do teach our calves how to be led on a rope. This helps our farmers move them around easier, and trains them to be led at fairs and expos. It's a bit like teaching a dog how to walk on a leash!



CALF CARE: RAISING JERSEY CALVES

THERE'S A LOT OF WORK THAT GOES INTO CARING FOR THE CALVES AT BILLINGS FARM. LUCKILY, WE HAVE A FARM STAFF THAT KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT TO DO! LET'S LEARN A BIT ABOUT HOW THEY TAKE CARE OF OUR CALVES.

FEED:

Calves can gain about a pound a day for the first few month of their lives mostly from only drinking milk. A year-old Jersey will weigh a little over 700 pounds. That's a lot of growing in one year! On our farm, each calf drinks colostrum from its mother for its first 3 feedings. Colostrum is the early milk a mother cow produces. it is full of antibodies and high in nutrition. The colostrum helps the calf develop healthy immune and digestive systems.

Calves at Billings Farm are fed a little less than a gallon of milk per day from a bottle. As we all know, calves don't have thumbs and can't get their own bottles, wouldn't that be convenient! So, our farmers fill bottles of milk directly off the milk line, then place the bottles in a pail of warm water so the bottles are closer to a cow's body temperature. They put a rubber nipple on the bottle and attach it to the calf pen. It only takes a couple minutes for the calves to finish their bottles!



Once the calves reach 3 months old, they are weaned and no longer drink milk. Starting a few weeks after birth, calves will begin to nibble on some hay and grain as well as drinking their milk. Our farm staff makes sure they get specific calf grain which is full of starches to help develop their stomach, and of course, they get plenty of water.

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HOUSING:

For the first three months calves are kept in separate pens. The individual pens keep the calves a safe distance from each other, so they don't pass on any germs to each other as their weak immune systems develop. We can also better monitor a calf's eating habits if she is singled out. This means we can see just how much milk, hay, and grain she's eating. Once calves reach three months of age their immune systems are better developed, and they can be put in group pens. At this time, they can also go outside, weather permitting.

Bedding is also very important for our calves. At Billings Farm we use clean wood shavings as bedding. Shavings make it easy to clean up any manure and they are warm and comfortable for the calves to lay on. Our cows also enjoy nice wood shavings in their pens.



GROOMING:

As our calves get older, they need more grooming. Our farm staff work hard to keep our calves and cows clean. Brushing the cows, and occasionally the calves, removes any manure, wood shavings, and dust from their bodies. In the spring, when the temperature has warmed a bit, the cows and older calves will be clipped or shaved. This shortens their coat so they won't overheat. About once a month, they will also have their hooves trimmed like we need our nails trimmed. It doesn't hurt, and makes it easier for the cows to walk.



ENVIRONMENT:

Just like people, calves like their environment to be comfortable. Calves are happiest in temperatures of 50-85 degrees. Temperatures under or over this range can put stress on their bodies to heat or cool themselves. In the calf nursery at Billings Farm the temperature is mild most of the year and we have proper ventilation to promote fresh air movement. If it is very cold, some of our smallest calves may need to wear a jacket. Calves also need a good source of shade if they are outside so they can get out of the sun.

ALL THESE THINGS HELP OUR CALVES STAY HEALTHY AND HAPPY. WE'RE SO THANKFUL TO HAVE A FARM STAFF THAT IS DEDICATED TO OUR HERD!

FUN FACTS ABOUT CALVES!



- **A FEMALE CALF IS CALLED A HEIFER, AND A MALE CALF IS CALLED A BULL.**
- **CALVES WEIGH ABOUT 45 POUNDS WHEN THEY ARE BORN AND GAIN 650 POUNDS IN THEIR FIRST YEAR!**
- **ABOUT 50 CALVES ARE BORN AT BILLINGS FARM EACH YEAR.**
- **COWS AND CALVES HAVE 1 STOMACH WITH 4 COMPARTMENTS.**
- **THERE ARE OVER 850,000 JERSEY COWS IN THE UNITED STATES.**
- **A JERSEY CALF WILL DRINK ABOUT 750 POUNDS OF MILK, OR 90 GALLONS, IN 3 MONTHS.**