

New housing systems with outdoor access for veal calves



Didier BASTIEN¹, Magdélène CHANTEPERDRIX¹

¹ Institut de l'Élevage, Monvoisin, station expérimentale veaux de boucherie, 35650 LE RHEU - FRANCE
didier.bastien@idele.fr

OBJECTIVES

In France, the veal calf production is organized around specialized fattening farms, mostly in closed buildings with dynamic ventilation. Young calves are collected from farms (mostly dairy farms) at an average age of 20 days, then placed in fattening farms. In a context of a structural decrease of its production and consumption, veal calves' production must respond to new societal expectations concerning the evolution of calves' housing conditions. As the main priority for citizens is to provide animals with outdoor access. **One of the objectives of Renouveau study was to test a new veal calves' production method.**

MATERIAL & METHODS



Traditional housing:

Closed building
Collective pen
Wooden slatted floors

VS

Collective igloos:

Light and mobile structure
Composed of a covered run
and an igloo
Litter



Three replicate trials of 40 male Holstein calves each were conducted at the veal calves' experimental station of the French Livestock Institute (Brittany, France), to cover **different climatic conditions**. The calves (n=120) were **randomly batched** based on their live-weight and age on arrival at the station (20 calves per batch) and were fattened for 24 weeks. Calves in both batches followed the **same feeding plan** and **health protocol**. Activity, growth performance, feed intake, calf health and carcass characteristics were measured.

RESULTS

- » Growth performance and feed intake were similar between the two batches ($p>0.05$).
- » The calves were not sicker in the igloos, neither in summer nor in winter.
- » The carcasses were slightly lighter and more colorful in the igloos.
- » Regarding calf behavior, calves in igloos spent more time ruminating (+50%), moved twice as much, but showed more cross-sucking than those in closed buildings.

THE FUTURE: an experimental farm to test new breeding models for calves

The **Calves' Innovation and Research Center** (CIRVEAU, Brittany, France) is unique in Europe. With a capacity of 480 places, the CIRVEAU is build-up of **5 units**, including 4 production units composed of "prototypes" farm buildings to test the launch and the feasibility of new breeding models for calves and 1 "central" reception unit:

