



## Keeping Beef Cows in Confinement

With the costs and availability of pasture ground creating challenges, producers are considering confinement options for their cows.

There are advantages to keeping beef cows confined in dry lots or bedded confinement buildings:

- Cows have reduced maintenance requirements with less walking to feed, water, and shelter.
- It is easier to monitor condition and health status of cows.
- When feeding a balanced Total Mixed Ration:
  - There is more opportunity to blend lower cost ingredients into the diet.
  - There is less under and over feeding of nutrients.
  - Cows can be limit fed to save feed costs.
  - It is easy to deliver feed to cows according to their condition.
  - Incorporate Rumensin into the diet for better rumen efficiency and reduced coccidiosis exposure to the calves
- Silage based diets can extend the life of broken mouth cows
- It is easier to process and handle cattle that need treatment.
- Artificial insemination can be improved with easier synchronization and estrus detection.
- With natural service, confinement allows for an increased cow:bull ratio.
- It is easy to fence line wean calves for reduced stress.
- Manure can be captured for fertilizer application on crop ground.

Keeping beef cows in confinement has its own unique requirements and challenges

- There will be an increased need for labor, equipment, and management
- Health and vaccination protocols become even more important
- Generally, the dryer the pen surface or bedding pack the healthier the cows and calves will be, but dust can also contribute to health problems.
- Air quality is very important for lung health, don't close buildings up
- For open lots, a well-drained site with southern exposure is best
- A creep area where the calves can go can give them a dry place to rest away from the cows
- Sort cows by age and/or body condition to improve targeted nutrition
- Cows need at least 2 feet of bunk space per head, even more with bulky rations
- Cows will need at least 100 square feet per pair in confined buildings, and 300-500 square feet per pair in well drained open lots.
- Shelter is more important for the calves than for the cows, but the cows can benefit from shade during the summer heat.
- Allowing gestating cows to graze corn stalks can help to reduce costs. A 2 year study done by the University of Nebraska showed that cows that were kept in dry lots and grazed on corn stalks in the fall had 32% lower costs than cows kept in confinement year round, and were competitive with cows kept on intensively managed pastures.

Quality Liquid Feeds  
3586 Hwy 23 North  
Dodgeville, WI 53533  
1-800-236-2345  
[www.qlf.com](http://www.qlf.com)

**#PP-2012**