

COWSIGNALS[®]

TRAINING COMPANY

Stress-free calving line for
happy cows and happy farmers

by Joep Driessen

AUTHOR



Joep Driessen is Veterinarian and Director of the CowSignals® Training Company, as well as CowSignals® trainer and consultant (Spanish, English, German, Dutch).

Joep Driessen: *“Let your cows live happily and twice as long”.*

More information about Joep Driessen and CowSignals®:

www.CowSignals.com

ABOUT THIS EBOOK

The CowSignals Training Company is all about sharing knowledge and sharing ideas. We can improve the dairy industry together. Whether you are a farmer an adviser or a trainer. You can make the difference. CowSignals can provide the right tools and know how to help you doing so. Enjoy this eBook. Enjoy your cows.

COWSIGNALS INFO

website : cowsignals.com
twitter : twitter.com/cowsignals
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Why a stress-free calving line?

Cows live longer and suffer less disease when they are housed in a stress-free calving line for 6 weeks around calving. The best farms in Europe and America have already years of good experience with the stress-free calving line. Easy calving, a lot less ruminal acidosis, endometritis, mastitis, milk fever and ketosis.

Farmers tell me: "I should have started with this system years earlier, it works magnificently. Most cows calve by themselves and start eating right away". You can prevent disease with good housing and management. Make life for the cow as easy as possible.

WHAT IS A STRESS-FREE CALVING LINE?

A straw yard for the cows 3 weeks before till 3 weeks after calving in line, with a flexible, clean calving area in between with overall good ventilation and easy supervision and easy entry to the cows.

WHY IS A STRESS-FREE CALVING LINE SO SUCCESSFUL?

You supply maximum comfort for the high risk animals in this 6 weeks vulnerable period:

- Maximum resting time on dry, soft, spacey and grippy bed
- Maximum feed space and no or little competition on feed intake
- Eating on the same feeding lane before and after calving
- Short milking times
- No or little standing time on concrete
- Feeling safe: constant eye contact with the same small herd for 6 week
- No stress by chasing or separation or moving out of sight from the herd
- Heifers can start quietly in a small group, less introduction stress
- Excellent supervision of your fresh and weak cows
- Cows can move freely
- Synonyms used for the Stress-free calving line: TLC (tender love and care) group, Vitamin L group (love), special needs group, maternity hotel.

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

You need space under a roof, enough straw, fresh air flow and cows.

We advise 8-12 m² straw area per cow (1 m² per 1000 liter milk per year). Dry cows can have 8 m² fresh 10.000 liter cows need minimum 10m². To keep them there for 6 weeks you need space for at least 10% of your herd (150 cows: 150m² straw yard).

This excludes the feeding alley where cows can go and eat; minimum 3 meter wide and preferably with rubber flooring or slats with soft rubber. You will have 50% of the manure and urine on the concrete. This will save a lot of straw. You have to bring in approximately 1 kg straw per m² per day.

With (temporary) overstocking farmers go for 2x straw per day. The barrier between straw and feed alley can be made from a 30 cm high wood. Removing straw manure every 6 weeks. In new buildings we like to make a 60 cm deep straw bed with a 30 high- 60cm long step out of the straw yard over the whole length.

This needs mucking out every 3 months. Do not make a fixed fence here but leave the access to the feeding table open over the whole length to give maximum freedom to come and eat (flexible bars or wire can do the job when needed).

You like to have maximum airflow (low cross ventilation over the straw pack) most time of the year to dry the straw and prevent mastitis. Only flexible walls are needed to close when freezing. Straw use is higher in badly ventilated barns.

A good alternative is deep bedded cubicles for the close up and fresh/weak cow groups. With a smaller straw yard for calving. This needs constant supervision (more labor) to move the calving cow in the straw area at the right time. Soft, spacey and extra wide beds (135 cm see cowsignals.com) and soft flooring in this area are essential. Go for 75 cm feeding space per cow.

CAN YOU DO IT?

Yes you can! This will be your best investment in years...

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Cows enter the straw yard 3 weeks before calving. They calve stress-free within the group (up to 90% without help!). For hygiene reasons or when help is needed you can have a separate calving pen. You can make a flexible box, with 2 smart gates in a corner of the group pen.

Give the cow luke warm water (hot tap needed on the spot). We like to milk the cow as soon as possible after calving in this spot, so design a locking place for the cow, a flexible gate to position the cow and a vacuum line for easy milking. To get the cow locked you might use the mother instinct by placing the newborn calf in front of the cows head lock, on top of the hay/feed mix.

After feeding the colostrums you move the calf and the cow will start to eat the hay/mix, while looking for her calf. Then you open the gate to the fresh cow group. Make fresh cow group size fit the size of one or 2 rows of the milking parlour, example: 2x8 parlour, fresh cow group is never more than 8 or 16, to assure short milking time and labor efficiency.

With milking robots this is not an issue (see Vetvice-Dairylogix robot barn design). After 3 weeks in milk, or according to good CowSignals sometimes earlier, you can take the fresh cows to the next milking group.

Check rumen fill (and temperature) of the fresh group daily. Feeding strategy in the fresh group: feed a bit further away from the feed fence and arrange 6 pushups with fresh feed per day to promote feed intake in this high risk group. Take care of maximum roughage/ structure. It helps when you create your new stress-free calving line in the main walking line from house to barn.

EXPERIENCE WITH STRESS-FREE CALVING LINE BY ARIE VAN RAMSHORST

(ZEEWOLDE HOLLAND):

"My 90 cows are producing 10.000 liter milk. I daily clean the cow beds twice. I also clean my straw pack twice a day to save straw, and every 2 months I clean the whole pen. I have around 68m2, mostly 6 sometimes 8 cows in here. The cow signals are clear: cows are resting and chewing to the max and the rumens are totally filled up within days after calving. The close up cows like to go out for a walk in the yard. Healthy cows give me a lot of working pleasure!"

By Joep Driessen DVM - more info and online training: www.cowsignals.com



