

FEATURE ON ICKNIELD FARM

Icknield Farm, Icknield Street, West Midlands

British Wagyu Commercial Member, Steven Butcher, runs a Wagyu rearing calf unit at his small farm on the southern fringes of Birmingham raising Wagyu F1 calves for Warrendale. With a background in construction, the 7.5 acre site was acquired around 10 years ago with a view to getting into and developing a farming business. Says Steven: "I spent two years prior researching what to do to make a sustainable farming business on limited acreage, and with the advice and support of a number people in the industry experts, we came up with the calf-rearing model based on modern facilities and the best care we can provide."

Having put up new light and airy sheds, Steven invested in Calf Igloo, a German-based company specialising in well-ventilated, comfy housing which is both warm in winter and cool in summer, and which keeps bacteria levels to a minimum. A dedicated full-time member of staff, Rachel King, is employed to look after the calves 7 days a week which arrive from selected dairy farms at around two weeks of age with the aim of leaving for a grower at around 180-200kg at 4-5 months old. Welfare is further enhanced by yoga balls hanging from the ceiling which the calves love to play with!



80-100 calves are reared in batches in two purpose-built barns using an intelligent electronic milking machine to monitor milk intake - and therefore calf health and growth - by means of EID tagging. A specially-formulated milk powder comes in from RD Chesters based in Bromyard. Calves are gradually weaned off milk starting at around 3-4 weeks and through to 6-8 weeks as they begin to take on solid feed which is fed ad-lib moving them gradually onto an all-grain diet from around week 8-10.

RD Chesters Agricultural Merchants also supply Icknield Farm with their Chesters grower blend. Produced in their new blend plant at Pencombe, Bromyard and made with only the best quality raw materials, the grower blend is designed for feeding alongside milk powder and help with a smooth weaning transition to maximise daily live weight gain to 400 kg before moving onto a finisher ration.

There are four igloos and four separate rearing pens to avoid nose-to-nose contact across batches. To date, mortality has been kept to zero with health a priority, and strict adherence to Warrendale's calf health protocol including veterinary intervention for injections (pneumonia, BVD), castration and dehorning which is carried out by 608 Vets. Advice, where needed, is also on hand from Warrendale production team members Clare Price and Jamie Higgins. The farm is Red Tractor approved and NFU members.

Concludes Steven: "As relative newcomers, for us the advantage has been to start afresh and come at calf rearing from a fresh perspective. Although we don't have a lot of previous experience, we have been able to take time researching the best methods, complete qualifications in calf rearing and come at things from a new angle and hopefully get the best outcomes for both our animals and our investment."



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