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Know your Physics: Correct Feed Bunk Dimensions for Post Weaned Calves

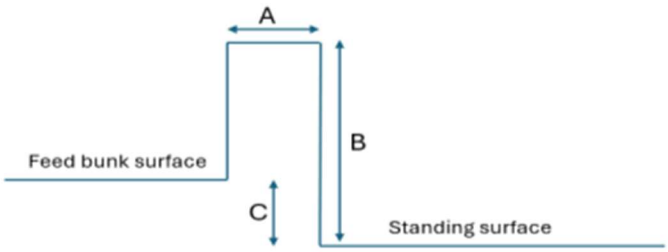
Ensuring our replacement heifers grow optimally and develop into productive cows requires careful attention to every detail — and one of the often overlooked aspects of their development is the feed bunk design for the first group pen after weaning. Proper feed bunk dimensions can significantly influence their feeding behavior, health, and overall performance.

Why Physics Matters!

Feed bunks are not just a place to put feed—they play a key role in promoting efficient feeding behavior, reducing waste, and improving animal health. Properly designed feed bunks make it easier for heifers to consume the right amount of fresh feed and reduce competition for feed access. A study done in 2012 showed that every 1kg increase in Average Daily Gain from weaning to the first heat, translated into more than 3000kg more milk in the first lactation. That is worth getting out the measuring tape.

Key Feed Bunk Dimensions for Weaned Heifers

1. **Width per Animal**
   For recently weaned calves, each animal needs enough space to comfortably eat without having to compete with others. The recommended feed bunk space per calf is **18 inches**. This ensures they have enough room to access feed without crowding, reducing stress and promoting steady growth.
2. **Height and Depth**
   The height and depth of the feed bunk is equally important to ensure ease of access. The height is dependent on how wide the curb is. A typical cement curb can be 8 inches wide, whereas a metal pipe or wooden plank is often 2 inches. See the diagram below for suggested height from ground level at the standing surface and from the feed bunk surface.



For the 8 inch wide curb A:
B should be no more than 14 inches and C must be at least 4 to 6 inches
For the 2 inch wide curb A:
B should be no more than 16 inches and C must be at least 6 to 8 inches
For the 0.5 inch wide curb A:
B should be no more than 18 inches and C must be at least 8 to 10 inches.

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Water Access

- **Width:** need minimum of 2 linear inches per calf
- **Height:** From floor to the edge of the trough should be close to 18 inches

Additional Tips for Successful Feeding

- **Bunk Space Design:** The overall design of the feed area can impact intake and waste. Ensure that the feed is spread evenly across the bunk, so all heifers have access to an equal amount of fresh feed.
- **Smooth Edges:** The feed bunk edges should be smooth to prevent injuries or pressure sores. Rough edges can lead to discomfort and reluctance to consume adequate amounts of feed.
- **Good Drainage:** Ensure that the feed bunk area has proper drainage to prevent feed from becoming soggy. Wet feed can lead to contamination and spoilage, which can cause reduced feed intake or even intestinal bacteria overgrowth

Conclusion: Investing in Proper Feed Bunk Dimensions Pays Off

Correct feed bunk dimensions for the post weaned calf are essential for promoting healthy, efficient growth and development. By paying attention to the space, height, depth, and overall design of your feed bunks, you'll improve the feeding experience for your heifers and set them up for future success in milk production.

A well-designed feed bunk system can ultimately reduce feed waste, prevent competition, and improve the overall health of your heifers. With the right setup you'll see better performance and return on your investment.

Feel free to reach out if you have any questions or need further advice on adjusting your feed bunk system to meet the specific needs of your herd

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