

Tips for Calving Season

There's nothing like calving season. As I've said in this column before, it's one of my favorite times of the year. Now that Wesley (my son) has started his own cow herd, we are counting the days until his cow Periwinkle calves. It's exciting to anticipate how that next calf will perform. Did we make a good decision at breeding time?

As a new calf crop arrives it's important to be ready for the challenges you might face during this special time of year. This month's issue focuses on calving — the birth of the next generation of Herefords.

Tom Field, Colorado State University animal science associate professor, and Twig Marston, Kansas State University Extension beef cattle specialist, say the basic necessities for calving season include:

- Warm water supply
- Ear tags and applicator
- Scales to collect birth weights
- Plastic sleeves
- Obstetrical lube
- Halter, cow restraint mechanisms
- Iodine naval dip

- Appropriate vaccines, syringes and needles
- Rehydrating solution
- Frozen colostrum (if possible)
- Calf feeding bottle/esophageal feeder
- Calving books for the crew — get your redbooks now from your local Extension specialist
- Obstetric intervention equipment (hopefully for use only in malpresentations)
- Written directions to your operation for new veterinarians
- Posted phone numbers of veterinarians and other appropriate people, as well as standardized protocols, for access by calving crew

Field also says it is critical to thoroughly clean calving areas, to have bedding on hand and to adequately train personnel.

Marston suggests having calving facilities that include a sheltered area for pulling calves, comfortable maternity pens, sufficient lighting and facilities for warming chilled calves.



“The benefits of taking stock of calving supply inventories and equipment and finding the time to spend an hour with the herd veterinarian to learn of new protocols are significant,” Field says.

It's important as producers to be “armed and ready” when the first calf arrives. Troy Smith, in his article on page 27, takes a look at how producers can prepare for calving. In Smith's article, Dale Zobell, Utah State University Extension specialist, says producers usually face fewer surprises when they first plan for a successful calving season.

“We prepare for it with bull selection, heifer management, and the health and nutritional management of the cow herd,” says Zobell. “We gear up by organizing the facilities where we are going to calve. We get ready for it by assembling the necessary equipment and materials to assist with calving, and to care for newborn calves. We aspire for it by scheduling adequate manpower.”

Another article by Smith on page 32, explains the importance of colostrum. This “wonder juice” is important for a calf's survival and long-term performance.

Contributing writer Heather Smith Thomas shares tips on calving heifers. Most producers will agree first-calf heifers tend to be the more labor-intensive group to manage at calving time. The article, which starts on page 30, explains when and how to help a heifer in labor.

Also in this issue on page 34 is an article on reproductive performance. Contributing writer Kim Kanzler Holt explains how nutrition plays a leading role in reproductive success.

Luckily Wesley has Papa Stump to help him prepare for calving season. Let's hope Periwinkle has a live, healthy calf, and that both momma and baby will tolerate a 5 year old who is excited to witness the birth and to “play” with his new calf.

Good luck this calving season!

Angie