

Prepare For Calving Season Now

by **Greg Lardy**, North Dakota State University's animal sciences department head and regular contributor to *Tri-State Livestock News*

For spring-calving herds, calving season will be in full swing in four to six weeks. If you haven't done so already, now is a good time to prepare for the increased workload by checking calving equipment and facilities.

Take the time to do a walk-through and inspection of your calving facilities prior to calving.

- Are the calving pens and working equipment ready for the demands of calving season?
- Do you have adequate bedding supplies ready to protect mothers and newborn calves from cold temperatures and snow? Hypothermia can be deadly for newborn calves. Keep a supply of bedding on hand in order to provide a more hospitable environment in the event of a storm or cold temperatures.
- Have you examined all the calving equipment such as calf pullers, obstetric chains, head catches, and calving pens to be sure they are in good condition?

Do routine maintenance and make necessary repairs now before you need the equipment.

- Invariably, cows and calves will require treatment for some sort of sickness or injury during this time. It is best to be prepared ahead of time.
- Do you have a supply of replacement colostrum available for situations when the cow may not produce enough? Ideally, a supply of supplemental colostrum from cows in your own herd would be used when you need to provide additional colostrum for your newborns. Store supplemental colostrum in Ziploc® freezer bags, Serving Savers®, or 16-oz. plastic soda or water bottles. These storage devices will make storing, thawing and feeding supplemental colostrum easier.
- Do you have pharmaceutical and veterinary supplies needed for the upcoming calving season? Suture, needles, syringes and other supplies can be difficult to find at

2 a.m. Be sure you have these supplies organized and stored in such a way that they are easy to get to when you need them.

- Cow nutrition plays a big role in calf health. If calving is still a few weeks or more away, it is time to do a serious evaluation of your nutrition program.
- Are the cows in good body condition or are they thin? If they are thin, separate them from the rest of the herd to more cost effectively boost the energy level in their diet.
- Have you inventoried remaining feedstuffs? Do you have enough high-quality feed to get you through calving season?
- Have the cows received adequate levels of fat soluble vitamins, especially vitamin A? If they've been fed low-quality roughage through the winter, providing supplemental vitamin A prior to calving may be warranted.
- Are the heifers and young cows



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being managed separately from the mature cows? Heifers and mature cows have increased nutrient requirements compared to your mature cow herd.

It is important to prepare now for the upcoming calving season. Don't wait for the first early calf to hit the ground! By then, it's too late! **HW**

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