

Calving Season's Greetings

Prepare for the upcoming calving season.

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Several months (or years) of hard work have prepared you for this calving season. Some cow-calf producers may be calving toward the end of the winter while others are eagerly waiting for the spring calving season to start. Below are thoughts and recommendations for farmers and ranchers to consider prior to the first calf hitting the ground.

Vaccinations

During the last trimester, preferably six to eight weeks prior to the start of calving, is a good time to run the cows through the chute for herd work. In addition to checking for pregnancy and potentially marketing those cows who are not pregnant, this is prime time to give vaccinations, which boosts immunity in the cow and prepares the antibodies in the colostrum for the impending calf. Scours vaccines and a respiratory vaccine that covers the common respiratory pathogens [i.e., parainfluenza-3 virus (PI₃), infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), bovine viral diarrhea (BVD), bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV) and a clostridium booster are highly recommended]. Other vaccination components to cover reproductive diseases such as leptospirosis or campylobacteriosis (previously known as vibriosis) may be useful. Always follow Beef Quality Assurance guidelines (*BQA.org*; funded by the Beef Checkoff) and adhere to label instructions closely when administering cattle health products. Working closely with your veterinarian will determine which vaccination protocols are beneficial in your area and for your specific herd.

Calving toolbox

Preparation and planning before a problem occurs will help lower your stress level should the need for intervention arise. In your calving

toolbox, you should have: a clean bucket, disinfectant such as betadine or chlorhexidine, OB lube, obstetric chains, handles, bag of rectal sleeves and latex gloves, more OB lube, a cow halter and a clean/dry calving area (if possible). Bright lights are a must, especially for late night calvings. If you have a calf puller or calf jack, it is essential that everyone is trained properly on how to use it safely and that it is functioning correctly.

It is also important to ensure you have supplies for after the calf is born. This inventory could include tags, a functional tagger, tagging pens, scales, colostrum replacer, milk replacer, esophageal tube feeder and potential supplements that your veterinarian recommends for your area. Ensuring your equipment is cleaned well and not worn out will set you up for greater success.

If colostrum quality or quantity is low, a colostrum replacement or supplement may be needed. Colostrum replacement products generally have the recommended 150 grams of Immunoglobulin G (IgG; i.e., antibodies) versus colostrum supplement products which will have less than that amount. These alternatives should be available at your local vet clinic or feed store. Colostrum can also be frozen from cows whose calf did not survive or from a local dairy. Colostrum should be warmed or thawed slowly in a hot water bath as microwaves will damage the protein and inactivate the IgG. Ideally, colostrum (and milk replacer) should be around 105 degrees Fahrenheit when fed. Work with your veterinarian to confirm the products are what you want and need.

Biosecurity

Keeping the environment as clean as possible for new calves will help them

start off on the right hoof. Newborn calves' immune systems are not fully developed until they are a few months old, so reducing the exposure to pathogens is important. Colostrum management is of utmost importance as this will provide passive immunity and a highly nutritious meal for the calf to keep itself warm.

Another strategy could include rotating pastures so those cows/heifers that have not yet calved are moved to a fresh pasture about every 10-14 days. This reduces the risk of younger calves being exposed to scours pathogens carried by the older calves. Accurate records will keep pairs matched up as you move cattle to new pastures. For further guidelines on biosecurity, record keeping, and herd management, we encourage you to review the BQA program and update your certification. Finally, disinfecting equipment such as esophageal tube feeders and OB chains frequently will minimize chance of infection in both the dam and calf.

There's a hack for that

A few calving hacks to leave with you as you await the arrival of your bouncing bundles of joy:

- If your arms are short or you are having difficulty reaching the calf in the birth canal, consider lying the cow down on her side to better access the calf and assist with calving.
- Keep your OB lube on the floorboard of your pickup to keep it warm.
- For hard pulls or difficult calvings, fill a rectal sleeve full of ice or snow, tie off the end, and insert into the dam's vagina to reduce inflammation.

Happy calving! **BA**