

Care At Calving Pays Big Dividends

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Spring calving season is here and it's one of the most rewarding times for cattlemen. A top calf crop doesn't just happen — it's the result of long-term planning, superior herd health care, and proven breeding practices.

Dr. John Hough, director of education and research for the American Polled Hereford Association, said by investing a little extra time with your herd, you may increase survival rates, calf health, and ensure more efficient growth potential.

During the last 30 to 45 days of pregnancy, cows will generally need a 10 to 15 percent increase in the ration volume, if they're being fed. For example, this can be an extra two pounds of hay in order to furnish an additional pound of total digestible nutrients (TDN).

The ration quality should be improved at the same time by slightly increasing the protein level. For example, the extra two pounds of hay may be legume or legume-grass mixture. You can also increase protein levels with blocks, liquid supplements, range cubes, or grazing small grain pastures for a short while every four or five days.

"Besides proper nutrition, a good calving site is important so you can keep an eye on calving heifers and cows," Hough said. "A small, clean, heavily-sodded pasture will work fine. This allows the cow to calve under natural conditions, rather than being restricted to a stall, shed or pen. Clean, portable calving sheds are beneficial, especially in areas where it may be difficult to check on the cows daily. It is best to avoid muddy lots and crowded enclosures."

Cows will normally calve in a one to three-hour period. If calving occurs normally, the cow should be left alone. If at all possi-

ble, it's best to check the calf almost as soon as it hits the ground. If delivery has been normal, it's unlikely you will encounter any problems.

"Make sure the calf is breathing and the nostrils are cleared of fetal membranes and mucus," Hough said. "If they are obstructed, quickly remove the material. If the calf is not breathing, try blowing into its nostrils and applying pressure to the chest areas. Or, use a straw to tuck inside the calf's nostrils to stimulate sneezing or coughing."

The calf should stand and nurse within 30 to 45 minutes after birth. If the calf is weak or chilled, rub it briskly with dry cloth or burlap bag to speed circulation.

Getting the colostrum, or first milk, into the calf is very important. The colostrum is highly concentrated in nutrients and antibodies to help prevent calf diseases.

Dipping the navel cord into a disinfectant solution can help prevent infection. Many types of disinfectant are available through veterinarians or animal health suppliers.

Once the calf is standing and has been claimed by the cow, most early calf loss problems are eliminated. After this point, most losses are due to scours. The risk of scours can be lowered by keeping the cow and calf in a clean environment and making sure nutritional needs are met. Should scours develop, standard treatment may help, but if you're the least unsure, contact a veterinarian.

Keeping the cow in top shape after birth will help ensure rebreeding on schedule, generally within 80-85 days.

"By providing good care to the cow and calf, you'll increase the probability of profitable calving and rebreeding seasons," Hough said.



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