

# Livestock Notes

**The Calving Toolbox**  
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Many beef producers are, or soon will be, into their calving season. This remains one of the most important efforts of the year for the enterprise.

Economic returns to the beef business start with the birth of a live calf. Now is the time to check your toolbox to see if you have everything ready.

The first item that toolbox should contain is a record book. The path to success and cost reduction in the beef business is paved with records. Birth information should include not only dates and weights for the calf, but some cow information as well. What kind of a birth was it? Does the cow appear to be milking well? Did she claim the calf right away? Did she clean the placenta in less than 12 hours? What kind of body condition was she in?

The next item would be some frozen colostrum or a good colostrum substitute. Recent research

at Penn State has indicated previously unknown benefits of feeding colostrum to the newborn calf, including a positive influence on male fertility. Get some frozen colostrum from a neighboring dairy farmer, but ask for colostrum from an older, poor producing cow, since the "goodies" in colostrum can be diluted in high-producing dairy cows. Feed a gallon in two feedings, 12 hours apart as soon after birth as possible, using an esophageal tube if necessary to get it into the calf. Waiting, even as little as 12 hours after birth, will have far fewer positive results than feeding right away.

Include ear tags, an implant gun, and a castration device in your toolbox. You will never be able to catch and hold a calf as easily as you can near birth. Identification is essential to good records. The implant can be used for animals destined for non-breeding purposes, and you will likely get about an 8 to 1 return for your investment (Two implants are currently cleared for use in newborn calves: Ralgro and

Synovex-C.). Finally, for male calves that will be steers at some time, make that time now. Remove the testicles by cutting off the bottom third of the scrotum, pulling them completely out, cutting the string of tissue that is left, and spraying the area with a good antiseptic. This is the most effective castration method, and is by far easier on the calf and more effective than rubber bands, clamping, or surgical castration at a later time.

Also include a set of obstetrical chains and a lubricant such as Ivory Soap. When cows are in labor for more than an hour, there is usually something wrong. When this occurs, managers should check for full dilation of the cervix, for a calf in the wrong position (such as a head or leg turned back), a calf locked at the shoulders (pull the legs through one at a time with the chains), or a hip lock. The latter can usually be corrected by good pressure downward between the cow's hind legs and rotation of the calf to allow the hips to pass through the widest portion of the pelvic opening, which is roughly a line from the pinbone to the opposite hock. The chains should be kept clean.

Iodine dips and selenium injections will be called for in most cases for new calves. The navel

should be fully bathed in the iodine for a few seconds immediately after birth. In many areas of Pennsylvania, soils are deficient in selenium, and too little selenium can cause white muscle disease in young calves. A 2cc-injection of selenium at birth can usually prevent this.

Calves can quickly lose body heat after birth, and this chilling is dangerous. Put a thermometer in your toolbox to check body temperature, which should be between 98° and 102° at birth. Body temperatures above or below these levels indicate a problem. Dry towels are probably the best help for a chilled calf right after birth, so have a few handy.

**Additional calving ideas:**

Do not underfeed cows during the last part of pregnancy to reduce birth weight of the calf. Although birth weight can be lowered slightly, extensive research has shown no reduction in calving difficulty, increased postpartum interval, and reduced rebreeding rates and cow productivity.

Since the largest percentage of calving difficulty will be in young cows, focus your time and effort at calving on this group. Breed these young cows ahead of mature cows so calving labor can be concentrated on them.

Feed cows at night to increase daytime calvings. The easiest way is to have the hay or other forage located in such a way as a gate can be opened after 9 p.m. and shut

again at 7 a.m. Using this method, you can realistically expect 80 percent of your calves to be born after 7 a.m. and before 6 p.m.

**USDA Releases Beef Microbiology Data — Results Show Very Low Level Of Bacteria**

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Results of the Nationwide Beef Microbiological Baseline Data Collection Program for Steers and Heifers released this week by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) showed extremely low levels of bacteria on beef carcasses.

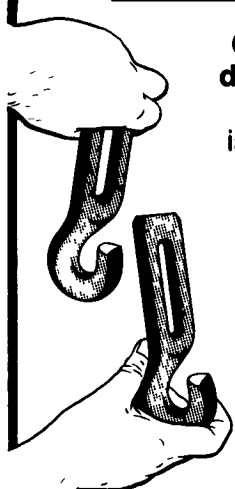
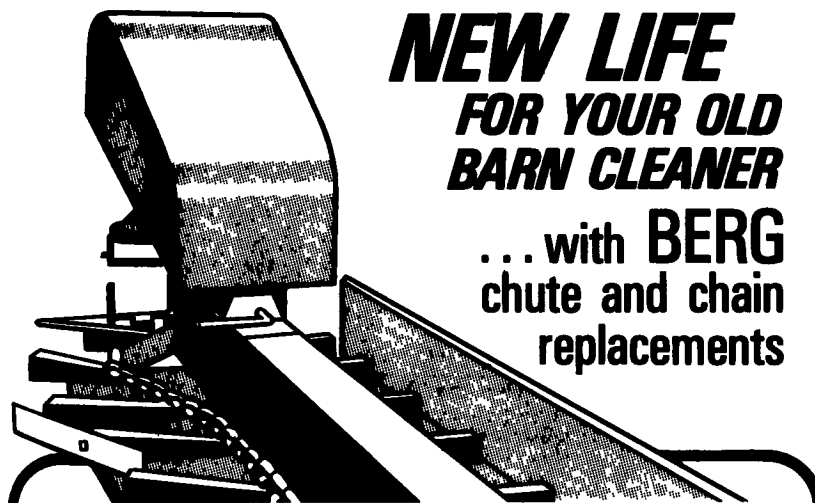
Of nearly 2,100 samples taken from raw beef carcass surfaces, only four (0.2 percent) tested positive for E. coli 0157:H7, one percent for Salmonella, 2.6 percent for Clostridium perfringens, 4 percent for Campylobacter, 4.1 percent for Listeria monocytogenes, and 4.2 percent for Staphylococcus aureus.

The samples were taken between October 1992 and September 1993 at federally inspected establishments responsible for approximately 99 percent of domestic steer and heifer slaughter.

USDA noted that the fact that bacterial levels are still present (although low) underscores what the National Academy of Sciences said in its 1985 report on meat  
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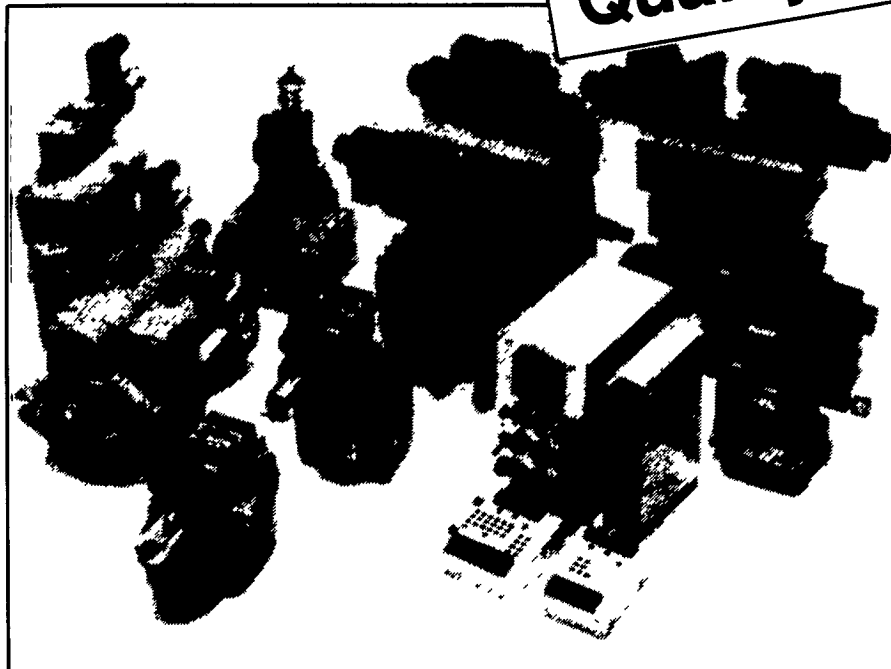


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