

Beef Management Update

Get Ready Now for Calving Season

By Dave Sparks, D.V.M.

Do you know where your OB chains are? Are there good batteries in your flashlight? Many cow operators are either starting their calving season or soon will be. A little time spent in preparation now can save a lot of frustration later.

Start by doing a walk through of your facilities and equipment. It is all too easy to forget about the headgate you broke when you used it last in the fall until you need it in the middle of a late winter or early spring night. Oil up the squeeze chute and make sure it works correctly. Take a look at the pens and make sure all gates swing freely. It is much easier to tend to these things on a sunny afternoon than in the middle of a cold and dark night.

Consider putting together a kit of supplies you might need in a tool box or 5 gallon bucket. What you put into it will depend on your comfort level as to what you are able to do on your own to assist a cow that may be having trouble. A list to consider would include a good flashlight, OB chains and handles, plastic sleeves, disinfectant, dish washing soap for use as a lubricant, antibiotics with syringes and needles, uterine boluses, and old towels. If you don't have colostrum on hand you might consider robbing some from an early calver that has plenty or a cow that loses her calf. Freeze it in ice cube trays and then pop out the cubes and store them frozen in ziplock bags to be thawed in warm water and used if needed.

Are you the only one who will be doing maternity watch? If you will have a hired helper, spouse, family member or neighbor on duty when you can't be, a lot of confusion can be spared by having a written protocol. Write on a card or cards what to do in a step by step manner indicating when to get the cow up, when to call the vet, appropriate phone numbers, and other information. Go over the cards with those who might be helping and make sure they know where the protocol is posted in the barn or office.

If you haven't talked with your vet for a while, or if you don't have a relationship with a local veterinarian it is a good idea to touch base before crisis time. Your veterinarian can provide good input into what you should include in your calving bucket and how to set up our protocol. Ask him or her how to contact them after hours, and where to turn if they are not available. He or she will also feel a lot better about coming out in the dark and cold from their warm bed to help with your dystocia or prolapse if you have taken the trouble to get their input during office hours. Saving one potentially dead calf can pay for a lot of veterinary consulting, and your vet bills will be much more reasonable in the long run if you have a good idea how much you can do and when you need professional help.

Most cow/calf producers are in the cattle business because it is what they choose to do. There is a vast difference in the enjoyment factors of watching a healthy and vigorous calf find his first meal, or losing a calf or cow. Being as prepared as possible before hand can make that difference.