

CATTLE CULTURE

by Lindsay King

Calf Hoodies

For anyone calving out in the cold, wet spring, one ranching family has home-grown solutions for keeping young bovine happy, healthy and, most importantly, warm.

Valli-Hi Angus Ranch is nestled in southern Idaho near Caldwell and Boise. For the last 60 years, Angus cattle have roamed the range under the Jenkins name.

Chelsea DeFriez, formerly Jenkins, is a third-generation rancher, following in the footsteps of her father and grandfather.

“My grandpa started this ranch in 1960, and my dad carried it on after him,” DeFriez says. “I am learning the ropes as my dad is semi retired.”

Spring-calvers

DeFriez and her dad usually start calving in mid-January. In Southern Idaho, that time of the year is synonymous with frigid temperatures. Keeping newborn calves warm is their top priority.

“We run all our cows into a gravel pit during calving season because it keeps them out of the winter weather,” DeFriez says. “The gravel has good drainage so it keeps them out of the moisture too.”

Measuring roughly 30 feet deep, the gravel pit once supplied materials for building roads in the area. After the county was done using it, DeFriez’s dad repurposed it.

“Usually when you calve out on pastureland, it gets tore up in all the wet and the mud,” DeFriez says.



“Where we live there is a lot of wind, so it also helps to keep the calves out of that when they are wet.”

The gullies and the hills provide plenty of reprieve from the relentless wind, but so do the calving shelters.

Calf hoodies

In the Northern states, it shouldn’t be surprising that frostbite is top of mind through the winter months. It’s an uphill battle for Valli-Hi; at least it used to be.

Back in 2016, when the snow, wind and ice just kept coming, the family needed a solution for preventing frostbite on newborn calves’ ears.

“I saw a lot of ideas online, like calf earmuffs; but nothing that looked like it would work for us,” DeFriez says. “All the research said it was best to keep calves’ ears against their head

to keep them warm.”

The innovative, do-it-yourself mindset is genetic in the Jenkins family. As an avid sewer, DeFriez set to build her own solution.

“I used some fleece and measured a calf to make a pattern for our calf hoodies,” DeFriez says. “We put some Velcro® on it so we could tighten it under the chin so it wouldn’t fall off.”

Armed with their own invention, Valli-Hi rarely loses ears to frostbite. Part of that is thanks to their 24 rule.

“Anything that is less than 24 hours old gets a calf hoodie on if the temperature is going to be less than 24 degrees,” DeFriez says. “After they are 24 hours old they are usually dry and their circulation is working a lot better. Plus, they are much harder to catch at that age.” **AJ**