

Careful Monitoring a Plus for Calving Management

Proper monitoring and health management can make a difference in getting cows and their newborn calves off to a good start.

"Producers need to be observant from the pre-calving stage all the way through the post-calving stage to ensure proper productivity," says Dr. Bill Epperson, Extension veterinarian at South Dakota State University.

Epperson says producers need to start monitoring cows as early as the pre-calving stage,

- | Check your cow's body condition. On a scale of one to nine, cows should be at least a five and heifers at least a six.
- | Examine your nutrition program. Make sure you maintain an adequate amount of energy, protein and minerals.
- | Take care of parasites and other possible health problems. Take care of lice breakouts, make sure the animal is de-wormed and given proper vaccinations for scours. Remember to read all the labels and follow directions closely.
- | Watch heifers. Most of all, producers need to be extremely observant, especially on their heifers, which are eight times as likely to require assistance through the calving process.

Once the cows are ready to start the calving process, producers need to take steps to cut calf losses.

"It has been estimated that from pregnancy diagnosis to weaning, producers lose 10 percent of their calves, with calving difficulty making up half of those losses," Epperson says.

Epperson encourages producers to closely observe their cows, especially heifers, every six hours for abnormalities when in the calving stage. "Cows actively straining more than one hour should be penned and examined. Cows that are "messaging around," that is separating themselves and acting unusual, for more than six hours should also be penned and examined."

Epperson emphasizes that producers must be ready for possible intervention and should discuss with their veterinarian if and when they should intervene,

Intervention may be needed:

- | If the cow's water-bag is hanging out for more than one hour without any calving progress.
- | If there is a prolonged period of straining with no progression.

- If there is an abnormal discharge coming from the cow.
- If the cow is acting sick or abnormal.

The post-calving process requires just as much monitoring, if not more, according to Epperson. "Commonly, post-calving problems occur, and producers really need to be capable of recognizing and dealing with them."

Common problems include: damage to calves from pulling, such as broken legs or ribs; a damaged birth canal in the cow; retained placenta; or prolapsed uterus,

Calving paralysis is also a common problem resulting from a difficult birth. "This requires nursing care and a decision on whether or not to salvage the animal," Epperson says.

Producers also need to make sure the newborn calf nurses within four to six hours and the mother accepts the calf.

"Proper calving management is more than a one-step process and careful monitoring is a necessity," Epperson says.

