



Calving Management

Beneficial Categories



Background

Before setting up and planning for calving management procedures, it is important to ensure cows and heifers are maintaining body condition before calving to ensure they will have sufficient energy reserves to support themselves and a calf. Calving management should be considered long before calving starts and involves year-round practices to minimize risk of disease or death loss at calving. Some year-round considerations include:

- Selecting bulls and replacement females that are healthy and fit well with the environment and goals of the operation
- Manage nutrition and minerals for cattle year-round to ensure body condition and health status are ideal for breeding and calving
- Implement a vaccination protocol for cows and calves
- Plan out the calving location and ensure it will have shelter as needed for newborn calves
- Get heifers and cows pregnancy checked to identify open and late cows
- Plan to calve heifers two to three weeks before cows to allow for increased observation, access to the cleanest calving environment, increased time between calving and next re-breeding, and reduced risk of disease in calves

Calving management plans will also vary based on herd size, when calving takes place during the year,, and facilities available. Producers who calve in January require indoor calving pens while producers who calve in April or May have the option to calve solely out on pasture. However, regardless of individual systems, there are specific common goals: having a live, healthy calf, supporting and maintaining the cow's health and successful re-breeding. Adopting certain management practices can help reduce chances of calf dystocia, death and illness in calves and cows, for both intensively and extensively managed herds. Your local veterinarian is a great resource to assist with calving preparation and/or calving questions. It may be beneficial to go over a calving plan with them before calving season begins.

Making a Calving Management Plan

Pre-calving checklist:

- Prepare dedicated calving facilities and ensure they are clean and in good working order
- Ensure the calving environment will be clean, dry, and protected from inclement weather (as needed)
- Collect any items that may be needed for calving and have them cleaned, prepped and accessible. This includes but is not limited to: colostrum (frozen or replacement), stomach tube, bottles and nipples, ear tags, halter and rope, disposable long sleeve OB gloves, clean OB chains and handles, calf puller, and a flashlight with working batteries.

During calving season:

- Monitor cattle as frequently as possible to identify calving issues and calves that need assistance
- Know when it is appropriate to intervene and provide calving assistance. Once a water bag appears, calves should hit the ground within one hour for cows or an hour and a half for heifers.
- Learn about the calf recovery position and techniques used for calves that may need assistance
- Ensure calves receive adequate colostrum within the first 24 hours of life
- Keep calving areas clean and dry between new calvings
- Keep pairs in groups with calves of the same age (within 3 weeks of age) to limit spread of disease
- Ensure calving records are kept and maintained throughout the calving season

Potential Economic Costs/Benefits

Preparing for calving season and having a calving management plan in place can help minimize losses from illness or death in both calves and cows. Loss of cattle is a direct loss in potential revenue at weaning time. Additional costs in management such as extra bedding, vaccinations and improved cow nutrition throughout the year can help to reduce potential death loss of calves during calving season.

Dystocia management can help reduce the cost of veterinary intervention during calving season. Overall cost of a calf increases when they incur a charge at birth thereby decreasing the margin of potential profit at weaning for that individual calf. Calves that survive dystocia have been shown to be 2.4 times more likely to sustain a sickness during their first 45 days of life. Therefore, the treatment is an additional cost. Some strategies to reduce the risk of dystocia calvings include:

- Selecting appropriate sires for cow size and development
- Ensuring cows do not become overconditioned
- Selecting appropriate cattle for the environment

Financial Incentives

There are currently no financial incentives for adopting a calving management plan.

For more information on Calving Management please visit the sites below:

[Merck Manual – Calving Management](#)

[Pearson, J., Pajor, E., Caulkett, N., Levy, M., Campbell, J., Windeyer, C. 2019. Benchmarking Calving Management Practices on Western Canada Cow-Calf Operations. *Transl Anim Sci.* 3\(4\): 1446–1459](#)

[Beef Cattle Research Council – Calving & Calf Management](#)

[American Angus Association – Calving Checklist](#)