

## Tagging Calves - Know Your Speed, Distance and Escape Route

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Reviewing the anticipated deadlines for animal tracking is important as the renewal of another calving season is well underway and finished in some cases. Checking cows that are calving is not for the faint of heart, which I was reminded of by a producer the other day. I was caught slightly off guard as he commented that his cows were fighting. I soon realized he was talking about calving and motherhood. At least in this case, the cows were more aggressive this year than in previous years.

It really doesn't make much difference if the cow is 1,000 pounds or 2,000 pounds. If the producer is between the cow and the calf, or simply trapped by the cow, even an ounce of cow muscle becomes a formidable mass capable of severe, if not fatal, damage. One can never be too careful.

The head up, tail up and snort are common among mothers of newborn calves. If the cow goes into this stance, the fight is on, so move cautiously. Even the most liberal cowpokes will place the final outcome in favor of the cow.

Motherhood triggers defense mechanisms that are not to be taken lightly. A newborn calf will be protected aggressively by its mother (and in many cases her fellow mother cows), especially if the approaching foreigner (person or animal) is a stranger to the birthing area.

Anyone who has been around a new mother realizes extreme care is the operational mode. Motherhood and all the behaviors prior to and during the delivery of the calf generally are hormonally driven. With the release of each hormone, the stage is set for the next step in the calving process.

The cascading effect of the numerous hormones during parturition, each in their own order, will affect the behavior of the cow and how she interacts with the surroundings. This is true with even those she is very familiar with, but especially those who are strangers.

The bottom line is that the cow is never to be trusted.

Most farm families never will know all the adventure and near catastrophic events their loved ones have faced in the calving pen. Most would say, "It's just part of the job," followed quickly by, "I love this life." (Perhaps all of us are a little warped at times, but truth be had, it is a great life.)

That also is why many a cow is given her space, allowed to calve and waved off until fall. At that time, the cows are ready for a little space and working the calves is not such a big deal.

Many of these points are totally missed in the discussion of the national animal identification program, and there is little evidence they ever will surface as points to be concerned with. Perhaps the planners need more cow contact.

The point of recognizing the true parent, in this case the cow, almost necessitates the placement of the tag at birth. This tag placement allows for the completion of the calving book, recording both the mother's and the calf's tag numbers.

Fortunately, after the new calf and cow settle down, life does return to normal for most cows and they are quite willing to allow producers to inspect the calf. But that is not always the case. Care always must be taken. No one ever should get in a position between a newborn and a cow in a no-exit pen or gamble that he or she can reach a gate before the cow does.

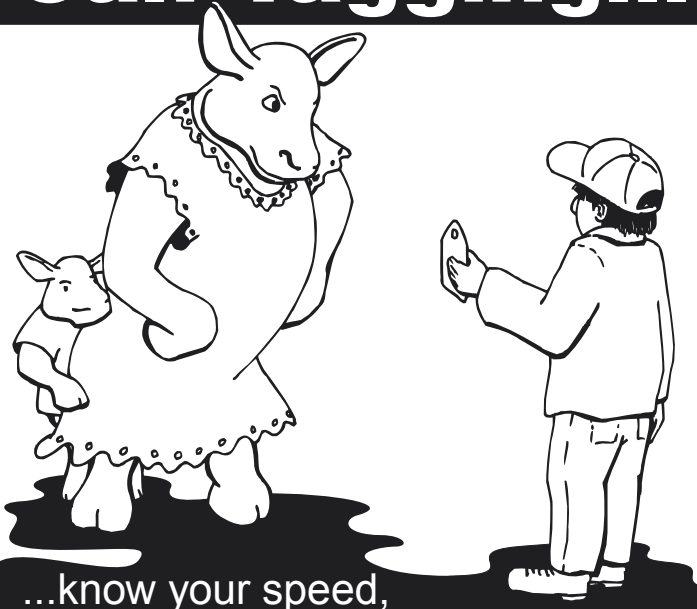
So be careful. Even a tag is not worth your life. If you are not careful, know your speed, distance and escape route.

May you find all your NAIS-approved ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://www.BeefTalk.com). For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to [www.CHAPS2000.com](http://www.CHAPS2000.com) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0296.

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