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BeefTalk: Producers Worry, Calves Survive



Producers must provide the right care for their cattle to survive and thrive.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

Have you ever wondered why fish that are deprived of water die?

For most, I doubt that you do because we all should know that a fish out of water dies. Perhaps it took a sad day growing up, when the goldfish was found at the bottom of the bowl, to realize someone did not hold up his or her commitment to the fish and provide water.

Cattle production is no different. Daily, we must be diligent, providing adequate care and facilities, and

Images



A quick call to the local veterinarian and a good calf vaccination program mean less worry for the producer.

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be engaged when needed. With calving season drawing to an end for some and maybe just starting for some, the needs for cows and calves out on pasture continue as they grow. New babies need attention.

Worrying about tomorrow is a human thing; dealing with today is more encompassing of all living things. That is not to say living things do not prepare for tomorrow, but tomorrow is only relevant if today is survived.

When agricultural producers start to manage livestock, the producer is the worrier. Producers have much to do to keep the calves healthy, but the calf is the survivor. Perhaps this is not much different than new pet owners who make sure the pet has the right environment to survive, and once again, the owner does the worrying.

In production agriculture, we invest dollars in our herds and flocks to generate a return on our investment. At the same time, we provide food and fiber for those around us. So we do what we can to assure a humane and caring environment for the calves, pups and other animals in our care.

Doing what we can is a very broad and defining statement. There is no magic, no famous potion or fancy formula. As beef producers, we need to meet "by design" the external environment that meets the survival needs of our beef cows and new calves, or the new pup and any other animals in

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our care.

Remember that: “By design.” If one were to go to the fish store and buy a fish only to come home and place the fish in a planter that has good drainage, what would happen? Simply put, the fish dies. The environment must match the animal’s needs; if not, the animal will not survive, or at best only linger, trying to hold onto life.

This may seem like a wandering discussion, but the point is very real. The calf is capable of surviving each day, given the correct management and environment, which is where successful beef production starts. Poor management within poor environments leads to failure; very few calves are around for processing following calving. Just like a fish out of water, producers aid survival by adding some water. Perhaps that is what calf processing is: a time when producers gather their calves and prepare them for the next stages of life.

Not all of life’s processes are as obvious as the water in the fishbowl. Much like our young pets, those first family gatherings, and soon the community gatherings, bring us into contact with many animals and people. Interestingly, part of life is surviving the many acquaintances that cross our paths.

The same is true for the calves. For now, they are quite content to follow their mother, eat plentiful grass and other living plants, and spend some

time running with the other calves in the pasture. But as a producer, the caregiver, we should worry.

I remember the springs when the barn cats had litters of kittens. But surprisingly, not many of the kittens were around come fall, and by spring, only one or two new mother cats appeared. The stark reality was generally that only the old mother cat survived.

A kitten's life is not easy, even when a good environment was provided. I would ask Dad why, and he would note that the old cat was around when the local veterinarian was by to provide vaccinations for the calves. Fortunately for the momma cat, she got her feline vaccinations as well. Maybe there was a connection, maybe not, but the cat did not worry; she just survived.

Likewise, after the calves and mother cows all were reunited and turned out to summer pasture, the mothers and calves did not worry, either; they just survived. Unlike the kittens, the calves were there in the fall.

As the producer, worried about tomorrow, a quick call to the local veterinarian and the establishment of a good calf-processing vaccination program means less worry. A good vaccination program certainly aids survival by enhancing calves' ability to respond to health challenges.

Although not always obvious to the producer's eye, health challenges are real. And as producers,

providing the right environment helps from the outside, and providing a good herd health program helps from the inside. Now is a good time to process calves.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension Service agent (<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory>) or Ringwall at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601; 701-456-1103; or [✉kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu](mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu).

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Attachments



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