

Damn – I Just Can't Get It

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Sorry for the language, but I am certain there are times when much stronger language is applied at calving time. A lot of thoughts go through the mind as one slowly trails an impending birth to the corrals for a check. Thoughts such as, “Is this going to be a calf that just needs a light tug or is this going to be an ‘almost’ calved,” which probably is the worst-case scenario.

In the cattle business, a check is a rather loose term. Seldom is a cow going to be released to simply be “rechecked” at a later time once the effort is made to put her in a chute. The physical handicaps are with the producer, not the cow, because many cows greatly outweigh a producer.

Just the thought of having to engage the birth process and more than likely having to call on some not so natural solutions is enough to make one stop and shudder. As for assisting in the journey, the rule of thumb is “better sooner than later.” The future mother may want to go elsewhere, but generally, she is no position to argue.

Frank Garry, Colorado State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital veterinarian, (<http://www.cvmb.colostate.edu/ilm/proinfo/calving/notes/home.htm>) advises when some intervention is needed. A cow may have been passing fluids for a couple of hours with no progress. Possibly, she may have been having strong contractions while attempting to push the calf through the birth canal for the last half hour.

In some cases, the cow gives up. She may have been observed trying to calve and then just stands there for 15 to 20 minutes, with no progress. Garry notes that normal rest periods are five to 10 minutes. Longer delays would imply the need for intervention.

The other obvious case is when the cow or calf shows a significant degree of stress. For the producer, things just don't look right or just don't seem correct. The bottom line is that regardless of time, weather or others demands, one producer and one cow are about to bond in a way no one else can.

Generally, the prognosis is good, but there are times when “damn, I just can't get it” are muttered. The epithet refers to a leg, the head or maybe the whole calf. When the physical demands outweigh the progress, there is no happy camp.

Many times, at least in a lonely work facility, physical exhaustion comes into play. “No easy task” is defined as the combining of a big cow and calf in the birthing process. This is not a lesson on how to deliver calves, but rather that calving is the optimum time to evaluate how many calves need assistance. It's also a lesson on the need to develop a list of potential solutions.

The process of calving comes down to two principles. The pelvic space needs to accommodate the passage of the calf. If the space is too small and reluctant to expand or if the calf is too large and inflexible, a very serious problem arises.

There are several types of calving difficulties, but many simply are a product of a cow trying to push a calf through an opening that isn't quite big enough. In the process, various parts of the calf become misaligned, so the calf is not only too large for the opening, but also in an abnormal position.

Much of what one experiences is avoidable with proper management, nutrition and genetic selection. Let us end for the day with this thought – It is known that those who exercise and eat right reduce their likelihood of experiencing heart problems. Likewise, producers who select the right bull and feed the cows properly will reduce their likelihood of experiencing calving problems. Although there is always the exception, prevention is the name of the game.

May you find all your ear tags.

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CALVING

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