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BeefTalk: Prepping for Calving Means Prepped Cows

If cows are well-prepared, the calving season will go smoothly.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

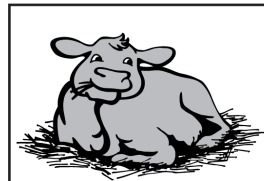
Take care of cows and they will take care of you.

The cows will do the work for you: calving, breeding back and bringing home a big calf in the fall.

Are your cows prepped and ready for calving? If in doubt, grab your sleeping bag and bed down with the cows for the night. Do not bring a pillow or snacks; keep your socks on your feet.

If the morning brings a refreshing new day and you are anxious for breakfast, welcome to the cattle business. If your bones ache and the

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thought of food disgusts you, get some help, not for you but for your cows and calves to be born.

Healthy cows are the key to a good calving season, which already is under way for some but looms fresh on the horizon for most. Sleeping with the cows may not be the total answer, but in reality, one gets a good gauge of the mood, the feel, of their contentment.

So are those very pregnant cows content? As winter's cold passes and calving approaches, contentment should be prevalent within the cow herd.

A good feeding program directly translates into contentment. A proper, balanced ration and correct supplements developed with a good nutritionist is important. In addition, a caution for feeding lower-quality feed as winter wears on: Low-quality feed can have a detrimental effect during late pregnancy and early lactation. Adding supplements and making sure the ration includes good-quality hay is essential.

Your nutritionist can help you balance the total ration and will smile if he or she notes you are providing 5 to 7 pounds per cow of excellent green grass hay or alfalfa in addition to the basic hay ration. The cows will be content and happy, and they will bed down after feeding without a care.

Unfortunately, the better hays are not always available, but that only means a trip to the feed

dealer. Once the daily feed needs of a cow are met, peace arrives. With a little wind protection, cows can produce ample enough heat to ward off even the coldest nights.

If you have experienced the pleasure of walking amongst a herd of very pregnant cows, ewes or other ruminants, you have a palatable feeling of contentment of well-fed critters, a pleasurable moment. This is the sixth sense of true animal husbandry. One knows the cows and the cows know you.

The third trimester has a very large impact on the cows as they approach their due date. Most cows handle pregnancy well; access to the proper feed, good water and a reasonable space with wind protection will keep a cow content. She likes a little independence and has no problem marking her space and waiting, waiting for the calf. Those herds are in for a pleasant calving season, especially if the pre-calving vaccinations have been done and no further work is needed to prep the cow.

Soon, the wet, struggling calf will arrive with a strong desire to nurse and receive a good amount of colostrum. Once a calf is dry with a full feed of milk, it will survive.

But what about cows that are less content? Take a look. Are they thin, hunched up, standing in the corner, bellowing, walking or distraught? If so, get

to know your veterinarian. Trouble is brewing, including calving issues, poor colostrum, mothering challenges, fatigue and, later on, scours, along with associated health problems. Maybe some extra feed now is really worth it.

Furthermore, nothing is more frustrating than to see a premature calf frozen to the ground with no mother in sight. Life goes on, and the site is cleaned up to the extent possible. The cow slips back into the herd, hidden by all the increasingly pregnant cows chewing their morning cud.

Abortion, commonly referred to as a slipped calf, is frustrating and can indicate pending problems as well. For every 100 cows, more than likely one, or maybe two, will slip a calf from unpreventable causes, including physical injuries such as walking on ice or genetic issues that prevented full-term development. However, any more should be an immediate call to the veterinarian to monitor potential causes and provide follow-up care for the herd.

The bottom line: Producers can recall crisis stories because a crisis always seems to be worth repeating. But producers can avoid the vast majority of crisis issues by preparing the cows properly for calving. Well-fed cows and no shortcuts, as well as a good relationship with a nutritionist, work.

Properly implemented herd health programs with a

veterinarian work. Selection for the right cow with the right genetics for the local ranch is essential. Feed well, raise stock with adapted genetics and maintain an excellent herd health program.

There are no shortcuts because cows have requirements. Management means meeting all the requirements in a cost-effective manner. Are the cows content? They should be, and the results will be evident in the fall.

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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