

Post Rock Extension District Column

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Livestock Production Agent

Preparing for the calving season

Being prepared for calving season is key to improving the success of your weaned calf crop. Here are some management tips to help you plan ahead this year. It's important to balance cow rations for adequate protein and energy for increased third trimester and subsequent lactation requirements. Try to group and feed cows by body condition and age to the degree possible. The target body condition for first calf heifers at calving is 5.5 to 6 and 5 to 5.5 for mature cows. Prior to calving, you should develop a sound vaccination program to prepare the cow to produce high quality colostrum. As always, control lice and internal parasites, plan for recording calving data, make sure facilities are clean and in good repair. Keep ear tags on hand and prepare tools for tattoos, banding or castration. You should keep OB chains, a calf puller, OB gloves, OB lube (non-detergent soap & water is one option), non-irritant antiseptic (Betadine or Nolvasan), and a flank rope in case you need to lay a cow down if she needs assistance calving. A cooler can also be used to keep warm water in the calving barn if no other source is available and always keep old towels on hand.

You should review basic treatment plans with your local veterinarian prior to calving for issues such as a retained placenta, calf scours, colostrum replacers and supplements and ensure necessary treatments and supplies are readily available including a functional thermometer. Make sure to also know the difference between colostrum supplements and replacers. In most instances, it is best to use replacers that contain at least 100 IgG per dose. Try to have at least 2 clean and functional esophageal tube feeders on hand that are clearly marked. One should be used for healthy calves, and the other for sick calves. If possible, plan and watch for any opportunity to collect colostrum from within the herd. Be sure to date and freeze any colostrum you collect in quart sized plastic bags. Handle healthy calves before sick calves and avoid exposing newborns to contaminants on clothing or materials used on sick calves. If you obtain replacement calves from outside the herd, plan for their isolation and testing before exposing to the entire herd to reduce the risk of disease.

Develop standard operation procedures for calving and for when you may need to provide assistance. Include a list of characteristics of calving and how to know when to intervene and provide contact information for individuals who can give expertise or assistance if it's needed. If you suspect the cow has been in stage one for over 8 hours, it is best to intervene. Stage one characteristics include restlessness, pain, lying down and getting up frequently, and seeking isolation (these signs are more apparent in first-calf heifers than mature cows). Signs for knowing when to intervene during stage two include the water sack is visible for 2 hours and cow is not pushing, the cow has been trying for over 30 minutes and no progress is being made, the cow has quit trying for over 15-20 minutes after a period of progress, the cow or calf is showing excessive fatigue or stress (swollen tongue or excessive bleeding), and you can observe the calf presentation is other than two front feet and head first.

After calving, calves should have colostrum within the first 2 hours of life, if the calf can't get colostrum from the dam, you should take steps to give colostrum within 4-6 hours of birth. Colostrum intake should be 10% of calf's body weight or 0.5 – 1 gallon. The first choice is for the calf to nurse a bottle so that the

colostrum goes directly to the abomasum. Don't over feed to encourage the calf to nurse on its own; a 1.5-quart dose is a good starting point.

Work towards developing a notebook that has all the standard operating procedures for your operation. Include things such as yearly vaccination plans, treatment protocols, calving and calving assistance protocols, euthanasia protocols, drought management plans and weather emergency plans. This will be a valuable resource when communicating with employees, new and old, when reviewing what needs to be improved for the next year or if a health emergency forces someone else to take care of the herd.

Thanks to Sandy Johnson, Extension Beef Specialist, and AJ Tarpoff, Extension Veterinarian, for sharing information related to preparing cattle for calving season and for further information, contact me at any Post Rock Extension District Offices in Beloit, Lincoln, Mankato, Osborne, or Smith Center.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Blaire may be contacted at blairet@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit 738-3597, Smith Center 282-6823, Lincoln 524-4432, Mankato 378-3174, or Osborne 346-2521. Join us on Facebook at "Post Rock Extension" along with our website www.postrock.k-state.edu.