

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER



February 25, 2023

## Spring Calving Season is Here

Spring calving season has begun and will continue through April. This is one of the most important periods of the year for beef production farms. A successful calving season not only results in live, healthy, fast-growing calves, but also influences how cows successfully breed back to repeat the process next year. Having calving equipment, supplies, and labor ready for the spring calving season is an important planning step.

Some supplies that may be needed are numbered ear tags and applicator, tattoo pliers and ink, record book, scales for calf weights, iodine for calves' navels and colostrum supplement. Calving equipment such as a puller and chains should be serviced and get facilities ready and clean.

Overall condition of the cow herd should be evaluated. Cows losing weight now are more likely to have weak or dead calves. These cows will likely be a poor source of colostrum milk for the newborn calf. Feed cows, if necessary, to keep them in good body condition. Cows need to calve in a body condition score (BCS) of 5, minimum, to expect them to rebreed on time. It is recommended to calve your heifers a little heavier, BCS of 6. Move heifers to a clean, accessible pasture, away from cow herd and near facilities so that calving assistance can be provided if necessary. Signs of calving are relaxation of pelvic ligaments, enlargement and swelling of the

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vulva, and enlargement of the udder. Expect calving difficulty if the calf's head and two feet are not visible, if only the calf's tail is visible, or if the cow has been in labor for 1½ hours. Be sure the calf is being presented normally before using calf puller. Recognize situations that are beyond your capability and seek professional help as early as possible. Calves that aren't breathing should receive assistance. Try sticking a straw in the nostril to stimulate a reflex, or try alternate pressure and release on rib cage. Calves should consume colostrum within 30 minutes of birth to achieve good immunity.

Record birthdate, cow I.D., and birthweight immediately. UK Beef IRM record books are available at the extension office and are an excellent management and record-keeping resource. Identify calves with an ear tag or tattoo. Registered calves should be weighed in the first 24 hours. Male calves in commercial herds should be castrated and implanted as soon as possible. Separate cows that calve away from dry cows and increase their feed. Increase feed after calving to 25-27 pounds of high-quality hay. Additional concentrate feed of 3-4 lb. for mature cows and about 8 lb. for first-calf heifers may be needed if you are feeding lower-quality hay. Hay analysis will greatly aid any decisions regarding type and amount of supplementation. Supplementation may have a beneficial effect on date and rate of conception. Thin cows don't come into heat very soon after calving. We must have cows in good condition if we plan to breed them early in the season for best pregnancy rates, especially on high-endophyte fescue pastures.

Sub-zero weather can mean death for newborn calves. During extremely cold spells, bring the cow into a sheltered area as calving approaches to protect the calf. Be prepared to warm-up and feed newborn, chilled calves. Calving in mud can also cause problems. Watch for scours in newborn calves. Consult your veterinarian quickly for diagnosis, cause, and

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treatment. Avoid muddy feeding areas so that cows' udders won't become contaminated and spread scours. Don't confine cows to muddy lots. Replacement heifers should be gaining adequately to reach target breeding weights by April 1st. Be sure that their feeding program is adequate for early breeding. Start looking for herd sire replacements, if needed.

After calving comes weaning. Kevin Laurent, UK Extension Associate for Beef Cattle will be at the Daviess County Extension office this Thursday, March 2 at 6:00 p.m. to discuss how to better synchronize weaning with periods of annually recurring higher market prices. A Beef Quality and Care Assurance training will be offered at 4:30 and the spring meeting of the Daviess County Cattleman's Association will be held in conjunction with the meeting. A meal will be served, please call the extension office if planning to attend to assist in meal planning.

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