

OSU EXTENSION NEWS

Taking advantage of good weather

These pleasant December days (after the rain and ice storms of the previous week) could be put to good use in preparation for the spring calving season.

Now is a good time to check the pens, calving stalls and the equipment that will be used in February and March. Do a "walk through" of pens, chutes, and calving stalls. Make sure that all are clean, dry, strong, safe and functioning correctly. Many producers use the calving shed or stalls for storage the "other" ten months of the year. Now is

an excellent chance to clear out the items that are in the way and not needed for assisting the cow or heifer in labor. This is much easier to do on a sunny afternoon than on a cold dark night when you need them in a hurry.

Now is also a good time also to begin the practice of "nighttime feeding." It is generally accepted that adequate supervision at calving has a significant impact on reducing calf mortality. On most ranching operations, supervision of the first calf heifers will be best accomplished in daylight

hours and the poorest observation takes place in the middle of the night.

The easiest and most practical method of inhibiting nighttime calving at present is by feeding cows late in the day or at night. The physiological mechanism is unknown, but some hormonal effect may be involved. In the most convincing study to date, about half of 1331 cows on 15 farms in Iowa were fed once daily at dusk; 85 percent of their calves were born between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. The other half of the cows were fed in the

morning and approximately 50 percent calved in daylight and the others between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. On many large ranches, it is physically impossible to feed all of the cows at or near dusk. In those instances, the ranch manager should plan to feed the mature cows earlier in the day, then feed the first calf heifers at dusk. The heifers, of course, are the group of females that are of greatest need of observation during the calving season. Many producers have big round bales of hay available 24/7. Delivering the supple-

ment late in the day seems to have a similar impact. Oklahoma State University records have indicated that 70 percent of cows supplemented at 5 p.m. calved in daylight hours.

Various means have been employed to effectively reduce animal loss at calving time. Experienced personnel should be available to render obstetric assistance and neonatal care to maximize percentage of the calf crop weaned in the cattle operation. Currently, evening feeding of cattle seems to be the most effective method of influencing parturi-



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tion timing so assistance can be available during daylight hours. Unfortunately a percentage of cows will still calve in the middle of the night. Therefore those 2 a.m. heifer checks are still warranted.