

Are You Ready for the Calving Season?

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Over 75% of calf deaths occur at birth and within the first two weeks of life. A healthy calf starts with a well-fed cow. Thin cows are weak during labor, give less colostrum, have non-vigorous calves and are slower to rebreed.

Adequate supervision at calving has an impact on reducing death loss. For most cattlemen, observation of calving can best be accomplished in daylight hours. Studies show that feeding at dusk should cause 70-80% of cows to calve in the daytime hours.

The next issue is the amount of time heifers or cows are allowed to be in labor before assistance is given. Calves from prolonged deliveries are weaker and more disease prone. Data from OSU clearly show that assistance is needed if the time from when the water bag first appears until the baby calf is delivered takes more than one hour for heifers or 30 minutes for cows. Females with prolonged delivery take longer to rebreed. **Rule of thumb.** If reasonable progress stops

after the feet or water bag appear, assistance may be indicated.

Even when heifers are adequately developed and calving ease bulls are used to prevent calving difficulties, a few difficult births are going to occur each calving season. Using the concept of evening feeding to get more heifers calving in daylight, and giving assistance early will save a few more calves, and result in healthier more productive two-year cows to rebreed next year.

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Signs of Impending Calving In Cows or Heifers

As the calving season approaches and begins, the cows will show typical signs that will indicate parturition is imminent.

Changes that are gradually seen are udder development, or making bag and the relaxation and swelling of the vulva. These indicate the cow is due to calve in the near future. There is much difference between individuals in the development of these signs and certainly age is a factor.

The first calf heifer, particularly in the heavy milk-

ing breeds, develops udder for a very long time, sometimes for two or three months before parturition. Typically, in the immediate two weeks preceding calving, swelling of the vulva becomes more evident, the udder is filling, and one of the things that might be seen is the loss of the cervical plug. This is a very thick tenacious, mucous material hanging from the vulva. It may be seen pooling behind the cow when she is lying down. Some people mistakenly think this happens immediately before calv-

ing, but in fact this can be seen weeks before parturition and therefore is only another sign that the calving season is here.

The immediate signs that usually occur within 24 hours of calving would be relaxation of the pelvic ligaments and strutting of the teats. These can be fairly dependable for the owner that watches his cows several times a day during the calving season. The casual observer who is knowledgeable of the signs but sees the

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herd infrequently cannot accurately predict calving time from these signs. The relaxation of the pelvic ligaments really cannot be observed in fat cows, (body condition score 7 or greater). However, relaxations of the ligaments can be seen very clearly in thin or moderate body condition cows and can be a clue of parturition within the next 12 - 24 hours.

These changes are signs the producer or herdsman can use to more closely pinpoint calving time.

Strutting of the teats is not really very dependable. Some heavy milking cows will have strutting of the teats as much as two or three days before calving and on the other hand, a thin poor milking cow may calve without strutting of the teats. Another thing that might be

seen in the immediate 12 hours before calving would be variable behavior such as a cow that does not come up to eat, or a cow that isolates herself into a particular corner of the pasture. However, most of them have few behavioral changes until the parturition process starts. Source: [OSU Extension Circular "Calving Management" E-1006](#).

Helping the Newborn Calf Breathe

Despite our best efforts at bull selection and heifer development, cows or heifers occasionally need assistance at calving time. It is imperative that the newborn calf begin to breathe as soon as possible. To stimulate the initiation of the respiratory process, a few ideas may help. First, manually clear the mouth and nasal passages of fluids and mucus. Hanging the calf over a

fence is not the best method to accomplish this task. The weight of the calf on the fence restricts the movement of the diaphragm muscles. The fence impairs the diaphragm's ability to contract and move. This diaphragm activity is necessary to expand the lungs to draw in air and needed oxygen.

A better method is to briskly tickle the inside of the nostrils of the calf with a straw. This will usually

cause the calf to have a reflex action such as a "snort" or cough. The reflex cough or "snort" expands the lungs and allows air to enter. Expect the calf to pant rapidly for a few minutes after breathing is initiated. Panting is the natural response that increases oxygen intake and carbon dioxide release and will allow the calf to reach normal blood gas concentrations.

Soil Sample Time is Now

It's time to soil sample your pastures, cropland, lawns, gardens and other areas that you want to grow well. Last year lots of areas didn't get fertilized because of fertilizer costs. It's time to re-examine the costs, compared to last year fertilizer costs are down. We must put back into our soils what we take out. Look at your costs and decide if you need to give back to the land. Healthy, well grown plants can withstand a considerable amount of insect and disease pressure. Proper fertilization also enhances quality and colors of plants. It also increases yield in the case of vegetables, crops and forage.

If you haven't soil sampled in the last 2-3 years, I would recommend it. Before you say I just have a small garden or lawn and I don't need to fertilize, let me relate what I see. A full 50% or more of homeowners soil sample results come back needing NO fertilizer. To be truthful, many homeowners have fertilized to the point of far too many nutrients having been applied and this is as bad for the plants as not enough fertilizer.

Go to a number of locations in the area you want to test and get cores, 6"-8" deep at each spot. On acres, this should be 10-14 spots. Mix them together and bring us a pint jar full. The cost is \$10. It takes a couple of weeks or so to get the results back. I will make a recommendation of what fertilizers can be used to satisfy needs. The longer you wait, the busier the lab gets and we might have a hard time getting back your results in a timely fashion.

Cattle Producers Schedule March Meeting

Mark **Thursday, March 26th** on your calendar! The Pottawatomie County Cattle Producers and the OSU Extension Service will co-sponsor a seminar on different marketing programs that are out there to market cattle. Topics ranging from value added, source and age verification, natural and organic programs that are available to you will be discussed. Producers have many options available to them. We will try to explain the differences and what would be your responsibility if you selected one of these markets.

We will meet beginning at **6:30 p.m.** in the **Tecumseh Ag-Ed Building**, located on the grounds of Tecumseh High School on North 13th Street. The meal will be sponsored by Chisholm Trail Farm Credit located here in Shawnee.

Please R.S.V.P. to 273-7683 by **Tuesday, March 24th** if attending. Please make sure if you call that you attend. Meals are purchased according to R.S.V.P. numbers. Those that don't attend still have a meal purchased for them. See you on the 26th!

Dates to Remember

There are a couple of dates to remember in the upcoming months:

April 30 **Beef Quality Assurance Program, Tecumseh City Hall**

May 28th **Tour of Beef Facilities at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater**

Details will come out later concerning these upcoming activities.

Gordon Cooper Schedules Ag-Business Programs

Tom Mikles with Gordon Cooper Technology Center will be conducting Ag Business Management programs you might be interested in. They are: **February 24**, Goal Setting, **February 26**, Cash Flow Budgets, **March 3 and March 10**, Quicken for Farmers, **March 12**, Budget Analysis.

If interested call Tom at 273-7433, Ext. 311 for details.

Vegetable Gardening and Fruit Tree Seminar Planned

The OSU Extension Center will host a **Vegetable Gardening and Fruit Tree Seminar** on **Monday, February 9**, beginning at **6:30 p.m.** We will meet at our office, **14001 Acme Road, Shawnee.**

With hopefully warm weather around the corner, gardeners will start to think about these popular plantings. Discussion will center around fertilization, watering, proper placement, disease and insect control and other production practices associated with vegetable and fruit trees.

It's free and open to anyone interested. **See you on the 9th!**



Can You Afford to Topdress Wheat?

There are several key points to consider when making the decision to topdress wheat. These include soil moisture, existing fertility levels in the field, ability to get material applied in a timely manner, and the expected price of wheat at harvest. This article will only examine and compare the cost of nitrogen in a fertilizer to the price of wheat. For the past few weeks, the Kansas City Board of Trade July 2009 hard red winter wheat price has been trading around \$6.20 per bushel.

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Can You Afford to Topdress Wheat?

At this stage in the wheat decision process, most wheat production costs are fixed or will not change. Whether or not to topdress comes down to whether the costs of applying additional fertilizer will result in a yield increase that more than covers these additional costs. A simple method that can be used to answer this question is a partial budget analysis. Simply identify the added costs, reduced costs, added returns and/or reduced returns associated with this decision. In this case, added costs would include the cost of fertilizer and its application (which could include some interest charges if money is being borrowed to finance the purchase) and added returns would be the additional yield times the wheat price; no reduced costs or reduced returns are expected.

A rule of thumb supported by OSU research is that 2 pounds of nitrogen are needed to produce a bushel of wheat. Therefore, to determine whether or not it is economical to apply topdress fertilizer, simply compare the cost for the 2 pounds of nitrogen needed to produce a bushel of wheat.

If it costs 60 cents for 1 pound of nitrogen from a particular fertilizer type then it takes \$1.20 to yield a \$5.50 bushel of wheat or roughly a 350 percent return to the fertilizer investment. If wheat is only worth \$4.50 per bushel and nitrogen is costing 60 cents per pound, then the return is 275 percent to the investment. In conclusion, wheat prices can fall to historical average levels and it will continue to be advantageous to apply a topdress fertilizer if additional nitrogen is needed to meet the yield goal for the current situation.



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