

News column for use week of January 27, 2025  
Kaitlyn Nelson, Livestock Production Agent  
River Valley Extension District  
January 24, 2025

### **Preparing for Calving Season**

January is quickly coming to a close and February is right around the corner. Some cattle producers might have started calving already and others are anticipating when the first calf will hit the ground. When it comes to having a successful calving season, now is the time to make those preparations. Even if there are already calves on the ground here are some recommendations to help get through the rest of the season. If you haven't started calving here are some management tips to best prepare for when you start.

Pay attention to body condition of cows and bred heifers prior to calving. Adequate body condition at the time of calving for young females and mature cows is important as it impacts stamina during delivery of the calf, colostrum quality, calf vigor, and also impacts subsequent rebreeding.

Examine calving facilities making sure they are in good working order. The last time this area was in use could potentially be 9-10 months ago. Inspect gates, pens, alleys and head catches, fixing or replacing broken items. Make sure cows will be calving in a clean, dry environment with wind protection. Wet, muddy conditions are stressful both to cows and calves. This kind of environment also provides a situation where disease proliferation is more likely to occur. Having a dry place for calves and cows to lay down will reduce stress and promote calf health.

Make sure your calving kit is ready in case a cow needs help in delivering her calf. Some items to include in your kit are plastic sleeves, obstetrical lube, obstetrical chains or straps, esophageal feeders and calf feeding bottles. Include flashlights or spotlights but test them to make sure they are working as well. Additional items to think about is take inventory of halters and ropes. Make sure the fetal extractor (calf puller) is clean and working properly. It is better to be prepared then to scramble when you need to provide assistance during calving.

Have colostrum or colostrum replacement products on hand. Quality colostrum consumption by the calf shortly after birth is foundational for the health of the calf throughout its life. The calf's ability for absorption of immunoglobulin across the intestine decreases rapidly 6-12 hours after birth. If quality or quantity of the colostrum is a concern, other sources of colostrum or colostrum replacement products should be used. Use caution when bringing outside sources of colostrum into the herd. Disease transfer can occur. The best source of colostrum is from within your own herd. Colostrum replacement products can be a good option to utilize when calves are not vigorous at birth, after a prolonged calving event, cold stress or where there is poor maternal bonding.

A fresh crop of calves is something cow-calf producers look forward to each year. Having a plan and preparing ahead of time for the calving season can help to minimize calf loss and reduce stress on those caring for the cowherd. If you have any questions feel free to stop by or contact Kaitlyn Nelson, Livestock Production Agent, in the Washington office, 785-325-2121 or [khildebrand@ksu.edu](mailto:khildebrand@ksu.edu).