



# Beef Briefs

**The Latest Information  
on Beef Cattle Nutrition**



## **Calving Time** **By: Jack McCoubrey**

Calving time is always a great time of the year for cow/calf producers, that is, if all goes according to plan; healthy, vigorous, smart calves that hit the ground and are up and sucking, and stay in a healthy state through the critical times of disease risks. The cow/calf farmers can surely help all this along with sound management decisions, planning, good housing and nutrition; this all works towards a successful calving season. My customers have asked to share some of the things I do on my farm. Right or wrong, here they are.

Here at my place, I start calving at about Christmas time and target to be done by February 10th to 15th. Get at it, a short compact calving season contributes to calf health immensely. A 45-50 day calving season minimizes disease and sickness, the longer the calving interval the more challenges may arise.

My herd is well vaccinated, including the scour vaccinations; I try to vaccinate 2-3 weeks before calving. I boost the cows/heifers that have not calved 35-40 days after the initial vaccination. I give an oral calf vaccine at birth to the new borns. There are some new inter-nasal vaccines that are proving to work well and over the following 6 months many of our producers are using these to great success. Discuss your vaccination protocol with your Vet. This is the most important time of the year for calf/cow health. Put a plan in place, this contributes to a healthy and happy calving season.



Check your calving equipment and supplies; somehow I always seem to manage to lose a calving chain or a handle. Do you have a supply of OB gloves on hand? Is your calf puller working, lubricated and in a handy spot? It is nice to never have to use any of these, but, let's prepare for

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the worst and hope for the best. I always have a few packages of dry colostrum on hand just in case. This may supplement a set of twins and sometimes calves from my 1st calf heifers, depending on what my thoughts are on 1st milk supply. Some producers will go down the road to the nearest dairy farm for colostrum, I don't think is a very good idea as it could bring in a whole new set of bugs. So, if you don't have colostrum from your own cows, I highly suggest the dry product.

With that, sometimes we lose a calf and too many times we head to the nearest sales barn for a dropped calf, 'real bad idea', this puts all your calves at risk. If you cannot source one from a set of twins within your own herd or from a neighbour or an associate with known herd health protocol, I'm leaving my cow barren. This is a major risk to calf health bringing in cows or calves from outside sources during the calving season, 'close the gate, close the door!'

There is always considerable discussion as to tagging your calf, what numbers do I use and what information

do I put on the tag? I struggled for years trying to use a number associated with the Mama, and it did not work. I now use the year letter number first and follow with 1, 2, 3, 4 and so on. My 1st calf this year is 401, 2nd is 402 my 30th calf is 430. On the back of the tag I record the mother's number, while some producers add the birthdates to the top front of the tag which is also good idea. I use the one piece Z tag, and have for years, it is pretty much fool proof as far as coming out of the ear. I put the tag in the larger 2nd rib of the ear and closer to the head; retention is for their lives in most cases here at my place.

My calvings are recorded in my calf record book and then transferred to my BIOLINK herd recording program. Don't lose your calving book, mine has disappeared from time to time and there is always a scramble to find it, having a backup record is a good idea.

There needs to be an understanding between you and your neighbour about cleanliness, bio-security and disease risks. During this time of the year no one is invited into my barns, you can look over the barnyard fence or gate, that is about as close as anyone with cattle that comes to my place will get. Many times I have been invited to see calves, this surely makes me uncomfortable, if there was a disease challenge, was it because I was



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there? Let's respect the task at hand and the risks of visitors.

My cows are kept in a good body condition; they are happy and healthy, as I am. I have the odd older cow that may need some additional care along with my 1st calvers. I monitor their body condition closely, this will affect milk yield as well as breed back time. Be sure to take care of your cows.

I have been calving in extremely cold weather conditions this year. I have an older style barn which I am able to close down when the weather is nasty and cold, and that has been quite often this calving season. I keep these barns and calving areas very well bedded, allowing for warmth for new born calves and also comfort for the young calves. If you're calving it has

to be in a clean and healthy environment, straw is a must.

During this real cold weather, those that have their cows outside need to make sure that there is some shelter from the winds. They also need to make adjustment to the feed to accommodate for the loss of energy during this extreme cold weather. Do not skimp out on feed, and assure that the feed is good; mouldy feed is a risk at the best of times. Abortions, calf health, cow health are at risk when feeding damaged and mouldy feed. I know each of us have been following the market, death losses and sickness surely are economically profound in this current beef market, look after your cows.

During this time of the year when I am calving, my mineral is a very important thing. I have seen and observed situations where no mineral was fed, or cows would not eat it, in most cases the calf and cow health was jeop-

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ardized. I have seen it, sickness, death, stupid calf syndrome, milk fever, retained placentas, slow calving because of lack of muscle tone. I can surely tell you, those producers that tend to detail, and there is an increasing number of these 'professional cow guys', they don't have sick calves and don't normally have open cows.

When feeding free choice I monitor my mineral on a daily basis. I put enough for a couple of days in good mineral feeders that will keep it dry. While the past two seasons I have used a TMR, my mineral goes right in the feed mix, this works well. Those that feed corn silage certainly can top dress the required daily portions, 'MINERAL MATTERS!'

Wishing each of you, a healthy and happy calving season!

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