



# The 411 on 911 Calvings

**C**alf losses associated with calving difficulty can be economically devastating for a herd of any size. In addition to dead calves, weak calves,

longer postpartum intervals (the time between calving and return to cycling) and decreased fertility can also result from a difficult calving. It's true, the current calving season is too late to make changes to reduce dystocia rates on your farm, but there are still a number of things you can do to improve your chances of a successful calving when assistance is required.

## Observe Cattle Frequently

Knowing the signs of impending calving and the approximate duration of the different stages of labour is essential to reducing the severity of the dystocia. Signs such as udder filling, relaxation and swelling of the vulva and loss of the cervical mucus plug can happen at varying times before calving, but indicate that parturition is nearing. Once these symptoms are observed, animals should be moved into a calving pen or an area that is clean, dry and easily accessible for more frequent monitoring. Relaxation of the pelvic ligaments and strutting of the teats usually occurs within 24 hours of calving. As calving becomes imminent, the dam will appear to be uncomfortable – lying down and getting up often, and may even isolate herself from her group mates if she is able. As calving progresses, the dam will usually lay on her side and contractions should become strong and coordinated to expel the calf.

For best results, cows and heifers due to calve should be observed at least five times per day, including throughout the night. If an animal is observed to be in active labour, she should be observed every 40-60 minutes to ensure adequate progress is being made and to intervene when appropriate.

## Know Who to Watch

Though any animal may need assistance due to a mal-presentation of a calf, it is important to remember heifers are 2.5 times more likely to need assistance as compared to an older cow. In some studies, heifer dystocia rates were reported to be 5-20%, and when bull selection was inappropriate, even higher at 50-70%. Over conditioning also puts an animal at an increased risk for a dystocia, so dams with "a few" extra pounds should also be watched closely and observers should be ready to intervene.

## Know When to Step In

As a general rule, if there is no visible progress within two hours of the "water breaking", it is time to check things out. Remember there are two sacs that surround a calf in the uterus – the water sac (chorioallantois) is filled with clear yellow, watery fluid. The second sac, the amnion, surrounds the calf and is full of more mucus-like fluid. If this sac has broken, calving should occur soon or assistance should be offered, as this is the fluid that lubricates during delivery. Another general

rule is if a calf is presenting normally in the



birth canal with both front feet forward and the head between the knees and shoulders, definite progress should be made within 30 minutes of the feet making their first appearance at the vulva membranes. Always remember it's better to intervene too early than to wait too long.

## Be Prepared

All farms should have a well-stocked, dedicated calving kit. This kit should be kept clean and should be easy to find when required. Inside you will need a halter or rope, a bucket of warm water, disinfecting soap, lubrication, calving ropes or chains, hooks and disposable sleeves. Additional resources that may be helpful include a head snare and a calf jack or rope and pulley system. In this box should also be a list of important phone numbers – include any one you may call in an emergency for assistance, most importantly, your veterinarian.

## Get In and Check Things Out

When you have determined an animal needs assistance, restrain the cow safely and securely. Always have the animal restrained in a way that both animal and handler safety are maintained, especially if the animal is to go down unexpectedly during calving. Wash the vulva thoroughly and tie the tail out of the way. Wearing gloves, or with clean arms,

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STAGES OF LABOUR		
Stage	Duration	Events
1	2-6 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uterine contractions begin</li> <li>dam appears nervous and will isolate herself</li> <li>calf is forced into the birth canal</li> <li>cervix begins to dilate</li> <li>water bag (chorioallantois) breaks</li> </ul>
2	30-60 minutes (cows) 60-90 minutes (heifers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cow is usually lying down</li> <li>strong, coordinated contractions</li> <li>calf is expelled through the cervix and vagina</li> </ul>
3	2-8 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uterine contractions expel the fetal membranes</li> </ul>

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determine how the calf is presenting. Are there two feet? Are they front feet or back? Do you find a head? A tail? Is the calf upside down? A calf can only be delivered vaginally two ways – both front feet and head first or both back feet first, and always with the calf right-side-up. If presenting in any other way, manipulation will be required to correct the presentation.

When the calf is in the correct position, it is important to determine if it is safe to pull the calf. Another general rule states for a head first calving, if one person can pull out the front legs so the knees are visible at the vulva and the head is within the birth canal it

is safe to pull. For a backwards calving, it is generally safe to pull if one or two people can pull out the hind legs so that both hocks are visible at the vulva.

Before pulling, time should be taken to manually dilate the cervix. This is done simply by lubricating the birth canal and repeatedly pushing both hands in through the cervix and pushing outwards. Attempt should be made to pull the calf manually, as excess force exerted by a calf jack or rope and pulley system can lead to higher stillbirth rates and damage to the cow, if used inappropriately. If a calving jack must be used, it should only be used by trained individuals in a proper and safe manner. Speak with your veterinarian to

discuss training options for proper calf jack use.

Most importantly, when you have decided to assist an animal, set a timer and know your limits. If you have not made any significant progress within 20-30 minutes, or the presentation appears too overwhelming to attempt, it is time to call your veterinarian for assistance. By seeking veterinary advice sooner, your chances of a successful outcome for calf and cow will be greatly increased.

Dystocia outbreaks can be frustrating, but always remember, having a plan and the proper tools in place to assist when necessary will make the best out of a bad situation. **OB**

## Predation Prevention Workshops - Coming Spring 2013

This spring, one day classroom sessions followed by hands-on workshops have been organized by the Ontario Cattlemen's Association and the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency for the Napanee, Ancaster and Barrie/Orillia areas.

Topics to be covered include:

- Assessing your predation risk
- Various deterrents and how to use them properly
- Rights and responsibilities under legislation
- Fencing

- Guardian animals
- Effective trapping, snaring and hunting
- Kill identification
- Predation compensation

Watch for further details on dates and confirmed locations. **OB**

## Changes to OBCFPP Licenced Dealers List

### New Licence

Country Dealers  
P.T.R Bovine Inc.  
7222 Clayton Walk  
Unit 2, London, ON N6P 1W1

### Licence Cancelled

Country Dealers  
Ineke Et Arie Maat  
48451 Yorke Line  
Belmont, ON NOL 1B0

### Abattoir

Metzgers Meat Products  
180 Brock Avenue  
Hensall, ON NOM 1X0  
(no longer processing cattle)

### Licence Withdrawn

Auction Market  
Talbotville Livestock Exchange  
9959 Lyle Road  
Talbotville, ON NOL 2K0  
(no longer in business)

The entire OBCFPP list can be found on the OMAFRA Website at [http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/fpu/fpu\\_lists.htm](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/fpu/fpu_lists.htm), or for more information:

Toll-Free: 1-888-466-2372,  
Ext. 64230  
Local: 519-826-4230  
Email: [foodinspection@ontario.ca](mailto:foodinspection@ontario.ca)

Thank You to our  
*Extravaganza Buyers!!!*

Lot 7 ~ Bar 5 SA Isabelle 802Y  
High Selling Female sold for \$12,000.00

Lot 5 ~ Bar 5 P SA Enticer 301Y  
High Selling Bull sold for \$31,000.00

High Sellers			
Lot 5	Bar 5 P SA Enticer 301Y	\$31,000.00	Agro Zurita
Lot 2	Bar 5 SA Bartholemeu	\$14,000.00	Circle 3 Genetics
Lot 7	Bar 5 SA Isabelle	\$12,000.00	Jaquarrete/Agro Zurita
Lot 97	FBMS 215M Mia 16Y	\$8,100.00	Ferm Sibelle
Lot 33	PHS Polled X N O's	\$7,200.00	Jaquarrete Simm

Watch for our...  
**Spring Spectacular 40th Bull Sale**  
**March 30, 2013**  
A Fullblood Simmental Fleckvieh Federation  
Endorsed Sale

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