

Save Every Calf
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The goal of every beef cattle producer should be to save every calf born on the farm. Every calf saved, adds to the profits of the farming operation. By understanding the birth process a producer can provide assistance to cows that are having difficulty.

Cows or heifers approaching calving should be placed in a separate pasture from the rest of the herd. The pasture should have a good stand of grass and be very visible from the road or house. As the female approaches calving, she should be observed at least two to three times per day.

When the female starts segregating herself from the other animals, she is “nesting” and wants a quiet place to calve. As the calving process starts, monitor progress from a distance. The use of binoculars is encouraged since the animal does not need to be disturbed.

When the birth process begins a water bag will appear followed by the nose. Look to see if the nose appears. This is an indication that the calf is being delivered correctly (head first). Next the feet should appear. Are the pads of the feet facing up or down? If the pads are facing down, then the calf is properly positioned. If the pads are facing up, then the calf is coming backwards.

The calving process should last less than two hours for cows and two to four hours for heifers. Some feel that it may be beneficial to assist heifers earlier. Observe frequently to see that the birthing process is occurring normally. If the birth process is not going properly, be ready to provide assistance.

When providing assistance, be sure to be as clean as possible. Be sure that the calf is properly positioned and then pull on the calf’s legs only when the cow is pushing. If it is necessary to go into the birth canal to reposition the calf, work only a limited time before seeking assistance. After about twenty minutes most people will get tired and will have limited success.

Once the calf has been delivered, give the cow a chance to bond with the calf. Observe to see that the calf nurses within the first two hours. If the calf has not had success in nursing, assistance may be needed. It is important that the calf receive the colostrum so it has antibodies that will protect it from disease.

After the calf has nursed, it is a matter of observing the cows and calves to be sure that no problems arise.

Every calf saved adds to the profits of the beef cattle operation. For additional information on beef cattle production and management, contact the local Extension office.