



Cattle Producer's Handbook

Animal Health Section

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Injuries and Diseases of Beef Cattle Associated with Calving

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The pay-off for cow-calf producers is being able to sell a weaned calf. To get this calf to market you must first get your cow pregnant and have her deliver a live calf. Several common problems affect cows from late pregnancy through calving. Many problems that occur during calving have a rapid onset and require a rapid response. The good news is that if they are attended to early they often have no permanent effect on subsequent breeding.

This publication presents common reproductive problems affecting beef cattle, a short description, underlying causes, possible prevention, and common treatment. These problems are presented generally in chronological order, from conditions seen before calving starts through the immediate post-calving interval.

Problems Pre-calving

Vaginal/Rectal Prolapse

Causes—The tissue around the birth canal becomes relaxed as the cow starts the last third of gestation. Increased pressure in the abdominal cavity will push the vagina or the rectum out. If the tissue is trapped outside the birth canal it will swell and may become infected. In some cases the bladder is also trapped, and the animal is unable to urinate.

This condition is more common in older cows but may occur in first-calf heifers. There may be a genetic link. Overly fat cattle and cattle on pasture with a high legume concentration are at higher risk.

Treatment—Epidural anesthetic is usually necessary. Replace the tissue and suture in place. Vaginal sutures must be removed before calving.

Prevention—Remove animals from the herd once they develop this condition. Don't keep animals that have pre-calving prolapses.

Don't allow cows to gain too much weight during the last trimester of pregnancy.

Ketosis/Pregnancy Toxemia

Causes—Cows are exposed to low nutrition during the last 2 months of pregnancy. Cows that are overly fat or are carrying twins are at a higher risk.

Signs—Affected animals become depressed, stop eating, and will often stand off away from the herd. Some animals will have the odor of acetone on their breath. As the condition gets worse, the cow will develop muscle tremors (trembles) and then go down.

Treatment—IV glucose, B vitamins, or propylene glycol given by oral drench. Any animal that is down should be lifted by a hip hoist 2 or 3 times a day for 15 to 20 minutes. In cattle that are in late pregnancy, consider inducing calving or a C section.

Problems at Calving

Dystocia

Any time a cow is unable to deliver her calf normally, a dystocia has occurred. Many management practices can be used to reduce the incidence of dystocia. Not