



Cattle Producer's Handbook

Management Section

787

Grafting Calves

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Grafting calves to a new cow is often a necessary practice for cow-calf operations. Many cattle producers graft calves to avoid raising an orphan calf artificially, which saves time and money. Grafting calves also maintains cow/ranch productivity. A calf may be grafted if the mother cow dies, a calf dies, twins are born, or a cow has a bad udder, or low or no milk production.

When grafting calves, the cattle producer must keep in mind how strong the sense of smell is to a cow.

Methodology

Several methods may be used for an effective and successful graft:

Skinning—Skinning is accomplished by removing the hide from a dead calf and applying it to the graft calf to lead the mother to believe the graft calf is hers. When skinning, only the skin over the back along with the tail needs to be used for an effective graft (Fig. 1).

The tail must be left on the hide, as this area will be the first that the cow will smell when introduced to the calf. The skin must be long enough to drape over the graft calf and be securely fastened.

Commercial Products—Several commercial products are available to aid in grafting calves. Commercial products generally consist of synthetic pheromones.

Fig. 1. (A) Deceased calf placed on its back (dashed lines denote hide cutting pattern). (a) Cut skin around neck (no need to include ears); (b) cut around the legs; (c) cut skin full length of belly; (d) leave tail on the hide; (e) cut holes in hide and tie with string after the skin is draped over the new calf. (B) Hide prepared for attachment to the new calf.

