



Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan Inc.

Calving: WHEN AND HOW TO HELP

The basis of a cow-calf enterprise is a healthy cow with a healthy nursing calf. Knowing when and how to help is an important part of responsible calving management.

A Cow or Heifer is Having Difficulty When:

- the cow actively strains for 40 minutes with no progress
- 90 minutes have passed since the waterbag first appeared
- the legs emerge with the surface of the hooves pointing up
- only the head or tail emerges
- an uncalved cow is mothering another calf
- a cow has demonstrated greater than 5–6 hours of anxiety, e.g. walking about, tail extended, apparently looking for something

To Examine a Cow That is Having Difficulty:

- restrain the cow either in a chute or in a safe and humane manner
- wash all manure away from around rectum and vulva
- soap your arm or use plastic sleeves with soap; hairy arms can bruise the birth canal
- explore the problem

Calves Should Only be Pulled if:

- two front legs and a nose or two hind legs and the tail can be guided into the bony part of the birth canal

NOTE: To distinguish front and back legs, feel the joint above the one nearest the hoof. If it bends the same direction as the lower joint it is a knee—front leg. If it bends the opposite direction it is a hock—back leg.

If the Calf is Malpositioned:

Gently position the legs and head correctly. Gently push the calf back a little way to get some working room. Do not push against the cow's contractions—work with her, not against her. Cover the teeth and feet with your hand as you move them to reduce injury to the cow.

NOTE: If the position is too difficult to correct in 20 minutes, or two strong people cannot pull the calf—call your veterinarian or an experienced cattle producer.

Attach loops of soft nylon rope or surgical chain to the legs. By convention, place a loop above the fetlock joint as well as a half hitch below. A loop may also be placed around the head—over the poll behind the ears and under the mouth. NEVER attach a loop to the lower jaw.

Pull back and down on the ropes for a head-first calf, straight back for a tail-first calf. Pull alternately on either leg to angle the shoulders through the pelvis. Two strong people (pulling force of 250 lbs. maximum) should be able to pull a calf into the birth canal.

Use calf pullers with caution. Remember to release tension periodically. Allow cow to push calf out.

PROVIDING ASSISTANCE AT CALVING

When Should You Present a Heifer or Cow to a Veterinarian for Caesarian Section?

A) If the calf is too big! This is measured by the following:

- if the front feet fill the pelvis and you can't get your hand beside them
- if with gentle pulling, you cannot get the head and feet into the pelvis at the same time; two people using body weight only (e.g. 250 lbs.)
- if the heifer/cow has been actively straining for 30–40 minutes and hasn't been able to push the head and feet (or the tail head if coming backwards) into the bony part of the birth canal

B) If there are other complications like:

- incomplete opening of soft tissues of the birth canal
- twisted uterus
- misshapen pelvis
- fetal monster

The Most Common Post-Calving Complications:

A) Prolapsed Uterus

If the cow is straining badly and the uterus is very flaccid, she may push the uterus out through the birth canal, inside-out. This large solid mass of tissue with 2–3 inch long "buttons" on the surface where the membranes attach is the uterus "inside out."

Action Indicated:

- restrain the cow, the uterus is less likely to be damaged and is easier to be replaced in cows that are down
- if there is a delay, cover the uterus with a wet towel or blanket to protect from cold and keep moist
- keep other animals including cows away; they may eat or damage the uterus
- call your veterinarian

B) Retained Placenta:

Normally the afterbirth will come away by 24 hours. There is no concern unless the cow is sick, e.g., with a high temperature and "off feed."

Action Indicated:

- daily antibiotic injections as directed by your veterinarian; if there is no response in three days, call your veterinarian



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FACS represents the livestock industry in advancing responsible animal care and handling practices in agriculture.

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