

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EXTENSION

COMMON MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES FOR A SUCCESSFUL CALVING SEASON

What is "Normal Calving"?

The actual process of calving covers 3 stages and can last up to 20 hrs - length varies between cows and heifers.

- **Stage 1: Preparatory (2-12 hrs) - Calf is entering the birth Canal**

- Time Frame:
 - Cows (2-8 hrs), Heifers (4-12hrs)
- What's happening inside:
 - Fetal cortisol increases = uterine contractions begin
 - Uterine pressure increases = calf rotates to front feet and head are positioned at the cervix
 - Uterine contractions increase = calf enters the birth canal
- What to look for:
 - Signs of discomfort - restlessness, arching of the back, slight straining, kicking at the belly
 - They will urinate more frequently and separate themselves from the herd
 - Fully Alert - may still eat, drink and otherwise behave normally

Stage 1 ends when there is a visible water bag

- **Stage 2: Delivery of the Calf (30 min-4 hrs)**

- Time Frame:
 - Cows (30 min-2hrs), Heifers (1-4 hrs)
- What's happening with the Cow/Heifer:
 - Calf in the birth canal = induces reflex to push (visible abdominal contractions)
 - Pressure on calf's feet and head in birth canal = rupture of water bag (lubrication)
 - Contractions strength = Cow/Heifer may lie down



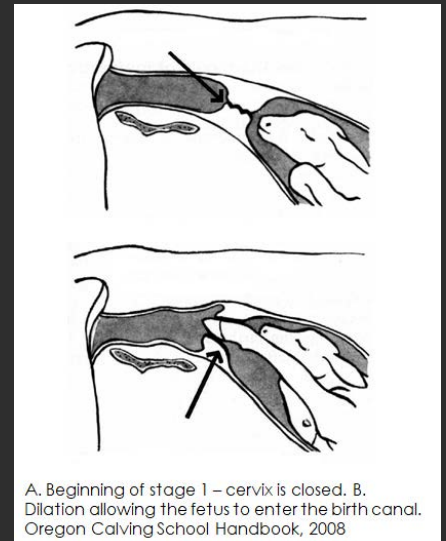
- **Stage 3: Delivery of the Placenta (1-12 hrs)**

- The placenta should detach from the uterus immediately after the calf is delivered
- Contractions help deliver the placenta from the cow - **DON'T HELP PULL THE PLACENTA THIS CAN CAUSE DAMAGE TO THE UTERUS**
 - Delivery can be delayed because of fatigue, but should be within 12 hrs of calf delivery

Calving Preparation Tips:

- **PATIENCE:** Calving is a marathon not a sprint, some things can't be rushed.
- **Timing of Feeding: Konefal Method**
 - Feeding a supplement forage once a day between 4-6pm (dusk) results in approximately 80-85% of calves born between 6am-6pm
- **Record Keeping: Maintain Detailed Calving Records**
 - Information to maintain: Due Date, Sire, Actual Calving Date, Time of Day She Started, Time Water Broke, When Feet Appeared, Delivery Complete, Length of Labor, Sex of Calf, Anything Abnormal, Anything Noteworthy
 - This information will help in future years to know what's "normal" for each animal
- **Colostrum**
 - Calves should receive 2 quarts (5% of their body weight) in colostrum within the first 4 hours after birth - Ideally 30 minutes.
 - A total of 1 gallon within 12 hours of birth to help develop a strong immune system
- **Make sure your calving area is ready (if indoors) and your calving kit is clean and equipped for the upcoming season.**

Patience and being prepared are two of the most important tools in your calving season tool box - Calving takes time, remember slow progress is still progress.



A. Beginning of stage 1 - cervix is closed. B. Dilation allowing the fetus to enter the birth canal. Oregon Calving School Handbook, 2008



How "Normal" Delivery Progresses:

- **Front Feet** - Soles of the feet should be facing down
 - Abdominal contractions become more frequent and intense - Progress may slow for a few minutes to allow for vulva stretching
- **Nose**
- **Rest of the Head**
- **Shoulders**
- **Chest**
 - Mucus may come out of the calf's mouth and nostrils - this helps clear the pathways for normal breathing
- **The Rest of the Calf**
 - Within 10 minutes, the cow/heifer should be standing and licking off the calf
 - Calf should be working on standing within 20-30 min and nursing within 60 min

Questions?

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