

UNIT : THE BEEF COW – CALVING

INTRODUCTION

Calf survival is essential if the system is to be profitable.

KEY ASPECTS OF SUCCESSFUL CALVING

- AIM FOR EASE OF CALVING – calves that are born following an assisted calving are many times more likely to die at birth and soon afterwards so ease of calving is critical.
 - Choice of cow
 - Choice of bull
 - Cow body condition at calving – cow body condition should be at 2-3 at calving and the ideal body condition should be achieved at least 50 days before calving and changes in body condition after that point avoided in the interest of the well-being of the cow and unborn calf.
 - Cow nutrition – energy and protein requirements must be met and mineral and vitamin levels in the diet must be correct.

- CALVING FACILITIES – outdoor calving generally provides a healthier environment for the new-born calf but if the calf is to be born indoors the aim must be to create conditions that are :
 - Well bedded down
 - Dry
 - Disinfected

- SUPERVISION AT CALVING – problems must be dealt with promptly
 - Well organised equipment
 - Cow restraint
 - Calving aid
 - Timely intervention
 - Veterinary assistance

➤ EARLY LIFE

- Navel dressing
- Colostrum

METABOLIC DISORDERS

- Milk fever – calcium deficiency (especially older cows) usually within 24 hours of calving when cows cannot access enough calcium from their bones and diet to meet their needs
- Hypomagnesaemia (staggers) – magnesium deficiency often as a result of lush spring grass (low magnesium) as well as any period of stress
- Ketosis (acetonaemia) and Fatty liver syndrome (hepatic lipidosis) are usually caused by a lack of energy in the diet

	Milk fever	Grass staggers	Ketosis and fatty liver syndrome
<i>Incidence</i>			
<i>Most susceptible</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older cattle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older cattle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older cattle
<i>Dietary cause</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low calcium in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low magnesium in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low energy diet and / or sudden diet change
<i>Likely cause</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depressed intake at calving • Stress e.g. difficult calving, transport, change of diet, change of group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of spring fertiliser • Stress e.g. bad weather 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wet grass • Calving stress (and peak milk production)

SUMMARY

- AIM FOR EASE OF CALVING
 - Choice of cow
 - Choice of bull
 - Cow body condition at calving
 - Cow nutrition
- SET UP SUITABLE CALVING FACILITIES – outdoor calving generally provides a healthier environment for the new-born calf but if the calf is to be born indoors the aim must be to create conditions that are hygienic and dry
- SUPERVISE AT CALVING – problems must be dealt with promptly
- MANAGE THE CALF'S EARLY LIFE – navel dressing and colostrum
- PROTECT THE COW AGAINST METABOLIC DISORDERS – milk fever, hypomagnesaemia (staggers), ketosis (acetoanaemia) and fatty liver syndrome (hepatic lipidosis)

INFORMATION SOURCES

HCC (2007) Making the Most of your Suckler Cows