
April 2022 DAIRY NEWSLETTER

Calving Tips and Tricks

First off, we'd like to thank all of our clients that came out to our producer meeting at River Valley Golf Course this month. We were very happy with the turn out and consider the meeting to have been a success! Our newsletter this month will be a little summary of our "Calving Tips and Tricks" that our bovine vets presented at the meeting. Do you have any feedback on our meeting style or content? Any topics to suggest for next year? Please pass along any positive or negative comments to your herd vet, we'd love your input!

1. Progress Checks: A good rule of thumb for calvings – we should see progression every hour

Expecting progress too soon can lead to forcefully pulling calves, resulting in vaginal tears, fractured ribs and other complications. On the other hand, waiting too long to intervene increases our chance of a dead calf. Checking for hourly progression is the perfect balance between being too "ram-y" and too laid back. For example, let's say you see a cow starting to calve with her tail up and pumping, circling the pen and pushing. When you come back in an hour, you might see feet, that would be enough progress to not be concerned. If you find no signs of progress at your one hour check, this is the time to investigate further and see if there is an issue.

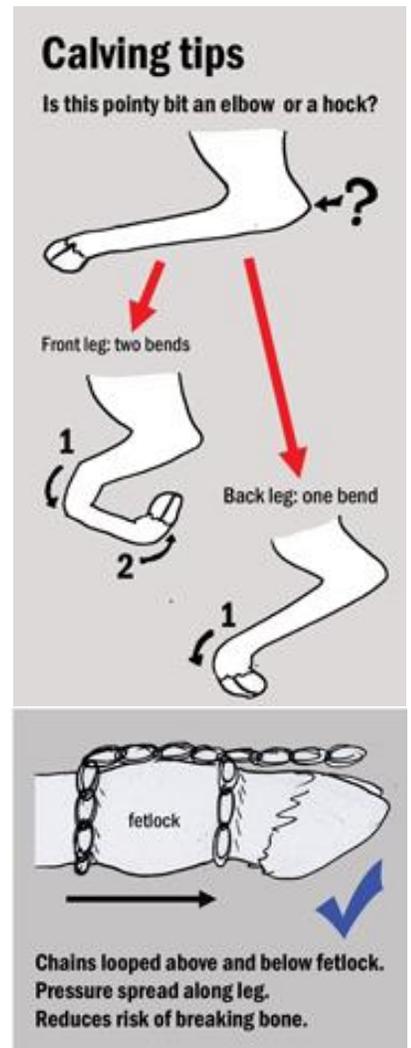
2. The Vaginal Exam

If a calving is not progressing normally, performing a vaginal exam should be your first task before calling the vet. Through this exam, you should be able to evaluate how dilated the cervix is, if the calf coming forwards or backwards, the position of the head and legs etc.

Deciding whether you have front legs or back legs can sometimes be tricky. Always remember that in a front leg, the first 2 joints will bend in the same direction. On the other hand in a back leg, they will bend in opposite directions. The hock and the elbow are sometimes confused for one another due to the presence of the sharp angle. Take your time feeling between the fetlock and the sharp angle, if there is another joint in the middle, this is a front leg!

3. The double half-hitch

Once you have correctly identified your limbs and ready to pull – always remember to take the time to apply a double half hitch on either side of the fetlock. This distributes the tension on either side of the joint and greatly reduces the risk of breaking the limb.



4. The rope pulley come-along/calving jack

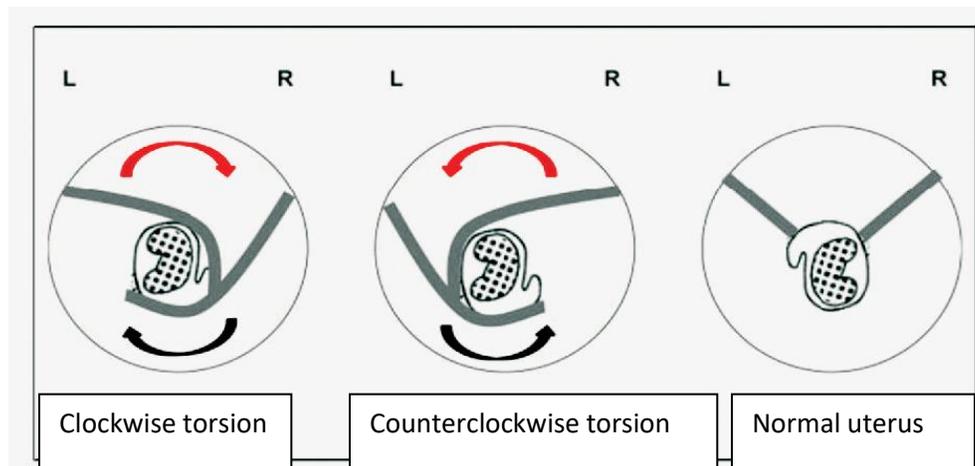
If you are unable to pull a calf by hand, it may be time to use more force. Before you use a rope pulley or a calving jack, always make sure that there is enough room for the calf and that you have 2 front feet and a head OR two back feet. If you don't have access to a calving jack, a simple rope and pulley system can be used. Attach one end of the pulley to the legs, and the other to a stable post. Cinch up the pulley rope until it is tight, then apply your weight downwards to pull the calf outwards. Once you have pulled the calf a few inches, take up the slack in the rope before applying downwards pressure once again Repeat these two steps until you have the calf!

5. The head back

A common calving call that comes in to the office is "a calf coming upside down and backwards". While there are rare instances of this presentation, more often than not it is a calf coming forwards with a head back. As stated above, remember to always take the time to assess if you have front or back legs. If you have front legs but no head – it's time to go fishing! Never pull the front legs without having access to the head, you will only drive the head further back. Find purchase on what part of the head and neck you can, pull it towards you, and then adjust your grip to the next landmark – neck, corner of the jaw, ear, eye, corner of the mouth, tip of the jaw. Once you can, apply a head snare around the back of the head and in the mouth in order to safely pull the head towards you.

6. Uterine Torsions

Uterine torsions are another common reason for lack of progression in a calving. When you are performing your vaginal exam, you may feel the tissue twisted around your arm or you may feel a cervix that appears tight and unyielding. If you are unsure if it is a torsion, the next step is a rectal exam. A normal rectal exam on a calving should yield a palpable calf and no tight bands. In a cow with a uterine torsion, you will be able to palpate tight bands wrapping on either side of the calf. The directions of the bands around the calf tells us if the torsion is turned clockwise or counterclockwise. In order to correct a torsion you have 2 options: roll the cow or detorse the calf. When rolling the cow, we always roll in the direction of the twist. When detorsing the calf, we turn the calf in the opposite direction of the twist.



7. Recovery Position

Now that the calf is born, time to get it breathing and recovering. The best way to assist a calf is to put it in the recovery position: put the calf on its sternum, with the front legs folded under the chest and the back legs pulled forward on either side of the abdomen. This position allows for the easiest expansion of the ribs and coughing to rid the calf of fluid in the airway. NEVER hang a calf over a gate, the pressure of the abdominal organs on the diaphragm make it more difficult for the calf to breathe – this is an outdated and detrimental intervention.

8. Calf Stimulation

If your calf is struggling to breathe and rid the fluid from its chest, we can stimulate the calf to cough via clean straw up the nose or cold water in the ear. Vigorous rubbing of the chest will also stimulate the calf to take breaths while in the recovery position.

9. Pain Control

After a difficult pull, it's always a good idea to consider pain control in both the calf and the cow. Getting the cow up, walking and eating after calving is key to preventing pinched nerves and slow transitions due to dystocia. Metacam or anafen are good choices to help manage her pain and get her to complete these tasks. If you had to excessively manipulate or use additional force to pull a calf, then it is always a good idea to give pain control. Calves with pain control on board will be more likely to have a suckle reflex and properly absorb their colostrum.

10. The Madigan Squeeze

After difficult pulls or abnormal calvings, you may be left with a "dummy calf" that is reluctant to stand and nurse. This condition may be due to an excess of a sedative neurosteroid in their bloodstream. The "switch" to stop the production of this steroid is turned off during the normal calving process. If the calving is abnormal, the brain may not have received the signal and may still be producing the sedative effect. We can attempt to trick the body by mimicking the pressure of calving, even if the calf is a couple days old. Simply tie a rope in a loop around the neck and one of the shoulders, followed by two half-hitches around the rib cage. Tie the end of the rope in a slip knot to maintain pressure and leave the calf tied for 15-20min. Calves that are experiencing the "dummy calf" syndrome should show in an increased suckle reflex and willingness to stand. These procedure may be repeated more than once if reversal is only partial.

