

As winter is now well underway, many producers will begin their calving season soon. In an effort to better prepare you for and hopefully prevent issues that may arise due to calving, the next few weeks we will discuss common medical calving incidences and tips for managing those incidences.

One of the most frustrating things a rancher may find is seeing one of his cows down after calving. Despite repeated attempts at getting her up, the cow will not stand. This scenario is likely a case of obturator paralysis. The obturator nerve of the cow runs along each side of the pelvic cavity and controls the cow's thigh muscles. Obturator paralysis typically occurs during calving if the calf becomes hip-locked. When the calf's hips are stuck in the cow's pelvic cavity, pressure is put on the obturator nerve for an extended period of time. If the nerve is blocked for too long, paralysis may occur. Obturator paralysis is not always permanent- especially if proper care is taken in the hours and days following calving.

For treatment purposes, the cow may be given an anti-inflammatory to reduce swelling in the pelvic area. No antibiotics should be given because infection is not the issue in this situation. Because the cow has no value until she gets up, it is extremely important that she is properly cared for in the meantime and does not stop eating or drinking. Rolling the cow from one side to the next every day will ensure paralysis does not worsen. It is also a good idea to lift the cow to make her stand and put weight on her back legs. Keeping the cow lifted for 30 minutes twice a day will aide in getting the obturator nerve to start working normally again. A hip lift is the best method to use when lifting a downer cow because it grabs the cow's hips and lifts her- preventing unnecessary pressure being put on her abdomen. If only a sling is available for lifting the cow, it should not be used until three days post calving in order to give the cow's reproductive tract time to go back to normal. Because slings put pressure on the cow's abdomen and reproductive tract, prolapse may occur if slings are used too soon post-calving, causing even more problems for the producer.

If the calf is alive it is critical that it receives colostrum as soon as possible, preferably within 12 hours of birth. Colostrum received at 24 hours after being born is of average benefit, and the calf's last chance for the colostrum to be of any benefit is at 36 hours after birth. Any colostrum received after the first 36 hours is of no benefit at all. We will discuss this issue further in a topical discussion of problems of the new born.

Without proper care, a downer cow may never recover, eventually costing the producer hundreds of dollars. Knowing what to expect and look for during calving season will help in making efficient management decisions if and when any incidences arise.

For more information regarding management of downer cows, please contact us.