



## Ben Beckman

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### CALVING PREP

Calving is a busy time at best, and heading into the season unprepared certainly doesn't help. As calves start to hit the ground this year, make sure that you're ready with plans and a toolkit to deal with any calving difficulty that may arise.

First on our checklist is a visit with your vet. Establish that relationship now, before a midnight call to deal with a problem calf. There may be a new face to acquaint yourself with, or on call protocols that are easier to understand now than in the heat of the moment. It's also a good time to discuss things for the toolkit like medication and pain management.

Next, find the place where a laboring cow can be dealt with. Ideally a location inside with good light. A solid place to secure an animal by rope or halter if needed is nice. If we are getting really picky, a pulley or beam to throw a rope over and help vertical lifting, especially in the case of a C-section is a plus.

With a veterinary conversations and a place to calve sorted away, let's take a look at the tool kit and see what items are useful to have on hand. We already mentioned a rope or halter to help secure an animal. OB sleeves and lube are next on the list. You'll want to be generous with lube if it's needed, so don't be afraid to get the larger jug. Most water based lubes work well and have the added benefit of being non-toxic in the case of a C-section. Other options like J-lube might be slicker, but can be toxic if they get into the abdominal cavity.

Next, a bucket, and disinfectant for cleaning the animal, tools and hands. We don't want any contamination of the birth canal, so cleaning any manure off the animals back end before working is a good practice to minimize this risk. Dedicated disinfectants are fine to use, but regular dish soap will do just fine in a pinch. A stainless steel bucket is great if you can spring for one due to the ease of keeping clean between cows.

If we do have to aid the cow, a pulling aid like chains or straps are invaluable. Chains are easier to clean and often longer, allowing the legs to be tied with a half hitch and spreading out the pressure across multiple points. Having a calf jack on hand isn't a bad thing, but make sure you know how to properly use it, when use won't cause problems, and equality important, when to stop use so a bad situation doesn't turn into a train wreck.

Once the calf is out, have some towels and rags on hand to help dry off and for cleaning up. Although maybe not regularly used, an item like calf claim powder or other scent discussing technique to help pairs that are having trouble bonding can be handy.

If the calf had a difficult birth or is otherwise struggling, colostrum replacer is another item to keep handy, as well as something to mix it up with and bottle and tube for feeding. We always want to use colostrum from mom first if we can, so milking out is our first choice. Second is colostrum supplied by another cow in the herd. If neither one of those options are doable, a replacer that contains greater than 100g IgG (immunoglobulin – G) is the next best thing. Make sure you choose a colostrum replacement not supplement. Supplements will contain lower amounts of IgG per dose and are meant to supplement low quality or quantity colostrum from the dam. Ideally, calves need to receive 5% of their body weight in colostrum within the first 6 hours of life. This is typically around 2 quarts. After the first 6 hours, the calf's gut starts to change and its ability to absorb IgG drops drastically. After 24 hours IgG absorption is practically nil. The last few items to have on hand are basic needles and syringes for both calf and mom, a headlamp to provide hands free lighting, a thermometer to help determine if calves need additional warming up, a place to keep records, and any ID method you may use like tags.

Calving can be a hectic time, but going in prepared can keep the twists and turns Mother Nature throws our way manageable.

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