

Dealing with Muddy Calving Pastures

Here in the Great Plains we rarely want to discourage receipt of moisture but this calving season we might say enough is enough. Almost everywhere you turn are muddy hay yards and calving pastures. It's difficult to get to the feed and then get feed to the cattle. Calves and cows both are suffering from mud on their bodies and feed.

From a pasture-only perspective, in wet conditions it often is wisest to restrict animals to a small sacrifice area that they might tear up and destroy but protect all remaining acres. This doesn't work too well, though, if you are dropping calves into this muddy quagmire.

Instead, it probably is better if you can restrict animals too small areas but move them to a fresh small area almost daily. It's a lot of work to move fence, provide water and feed, and move the animals but it might be worth it. Pastures torn up for just one day usually recover quickly, especially if damage occurs before green-up. But if cattle remain on the same area for several days, recovery could be slow or not occur at all. In addition, frequent movement to fresh, clean areas greatly improves sanitation, reducing scours and other health problems for the calves and limiting the udder scabs, foot rot, and other challenges facing the cows.

Be sure to consider corn stalk pastures in your movement plan. Not only will this increase your acres available but corn ground often is on more upland, better drained areas that might not be as wet.

Fighting mud this spring may take all of your resources, patience, and ingenuity. Use them all to your best advantage.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu

