

Common Management Techniques for a Successful Calving Season

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What is Successful Calving?

- “Normal Calving”
 - What to Expect with each Stage of Labor
- Calving Prep Tips
- Patience.

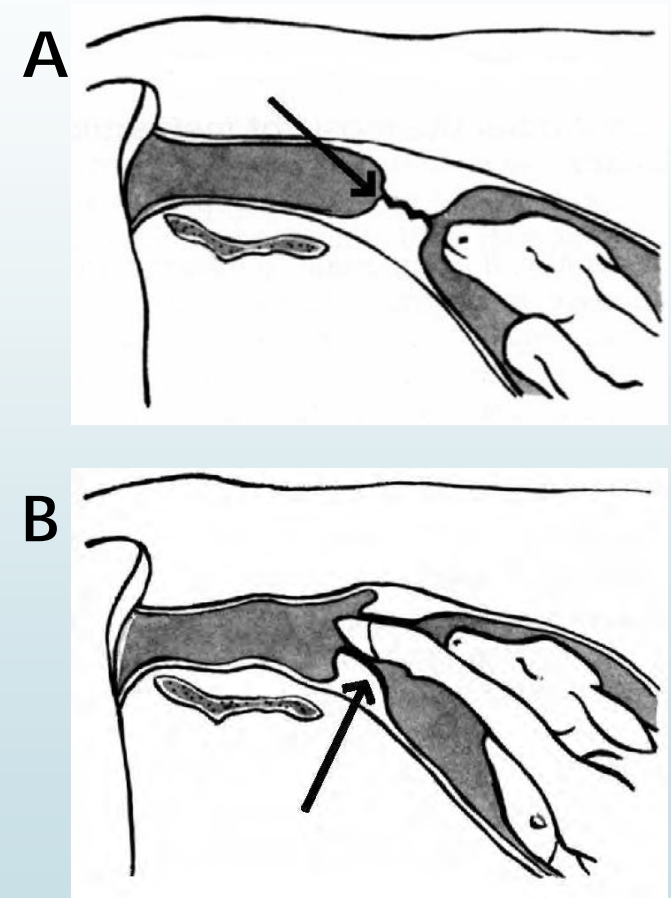
What is “Normal Calving”

- The actual process of calving covers 3 stages and can last up to 20 hours – length varies between cows and heifers
 - Stage 1: Preparatory Stage (2 to 12 hours)
 - Stage 2: Expulsion of the Fetus – Delivery of the Calf (60 minutes to 4 hours)
 - Stage 3: Expulsion of the Placenta (1 to 12 hours)

Stage 1: Preparatory (Cows 2-8hrs, Heifers 4-12hrs) – Calf is prepping to enter the birth canal.

- ▶ What's happening inside:
 - ▶ Fetal cortisol (stress hormone) starts a chain reaction causing Uterine contractions.
 - ▶ As uterine pressure increases, the fetus rotates so front feet and head are positioned at the cervix
 - ▶ Uterine contractions increase, pushing the fetus toward the dilating cervix – allowing for the fetus to enter the birth canal.
- ▶ What to look for:
 - ▶ Signs of discomfort – restlessness, arching of the back, slight straining, kicking at the belly
 - ▶ Cows will separate themselves from the herd and urinate more frequently
 - ▶ Fully alert, may still eat, drink and otherwise behave normally

Stage 1 ends with expulsion of the water bag.



A. Beginning of stage 1 – cervix is closed. B. Dilation allowing the fetus to enter the birth canal. Oregon Calving School Handbook, 2008

Stage 2: Fetal Expulsion (Cows 60 minutes, Heifers 1-4hrs) – Delivery of the Calf

- ▶ What's happening with the Cow/Heifer:
 - ▶ Fetus in the birth canal puts pressure on the cervix and induces the reflex to push – visible abdominal contractions
 - ▶ Pressure of feet and head in the birth canal results in rupture of water bag – helping lubrication
 - ▶ Contractions strengthen and cows may lie down to cope with pain and discomfort
- ▶ How delivery progresses for the calf:
 - ▶ Front Feet – **Soles of feet should be facing down**
 - ▶ Abdominal contractions become more frequent and intense. Progress may slow down for a few minutes to allow vulva to stretch
 - ▶ Nose
 - ▶ Rest of the Head
 - ▶ Shoulders
 - ▶ Chest
 - ▶ Mucus may come out of the calf's mouth and nostrils this clears the respiratory passages for normal breathing
 - ▶ The Rest of the Calf
 - ▶ Within 10 minutes, the cow should be standing and licking off the calf. Calf should be working on standing within 20-30 minutes and nursing within 60 minutes post-birth.



Stage 3: Expulsion of the Placenta (1-12 hours)

- The placenta should detach from the uterus almost immediately after the calf is delivered
 - Cotyledons (buttons) on the placenta separate from the caruncles on the uterus
- Contractions expel the placenta from the cow
 - Expulsion can be delayed because of fatigue, but it isn't considered retained unless its over 12 hours



Calving Prep Tips

- Konefal Method (Named for Gus Konefal a Canadian Rancher)
 - Study by the University of Iowa found that feeding once a day at dusk (between 4-6pm) 85.28% of calves were born between 6am-6pm
- Maintain Detailed Calving Records
 - Information to maintain: Due Date, Sire, Actual Calving Date, Time of Day She Started, Time Water Broke, When Feet Appeared, Delivery Complete (How Long it Took), Sex of Calf, Anything Abnormal, Notes
 - Will help in future years to know what's "normal" for each animal
- Make sure your calving area is ready (if indoors) and your calving kit is clean and equipped for the upcoming season.

Patience :

These things take time – let them.
Continued progress is progress.

