Planning for a Successful Calving Season

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Overview

Preparation is vital for an optimum calving season. Barns and pens should be decluttered and cleaned. A clean, sheltered area should be designated to bring calves that need to be warmed, dried or monitored. All working facilities need a second or third glance to ensure functionality, and the calving kit requires a full inspection. In addition to the calving kit, general medical supplies should include nonirritant antiseptic, iodine solution and injectable antibiotics.

Figure 1. One-day old calf bedded down in hay.
Photo by Ashley K. Edwards

Considerations for Your Calving Kit

1. Obstetric and exam gloves
2. Lubricant
3. Colostrum replacers
   Milk replacers
   Electrolytes
4. Calf bottle
   Calf nipple
5. Paper towels
6. Old bath towels
7. Heating pad or blanket
8. 5- to 10-gallon bucket
   (Not pictured)
9. Flashlight with extra batteries
10. Obstetric chains and handles
11. Mechanical calf puller

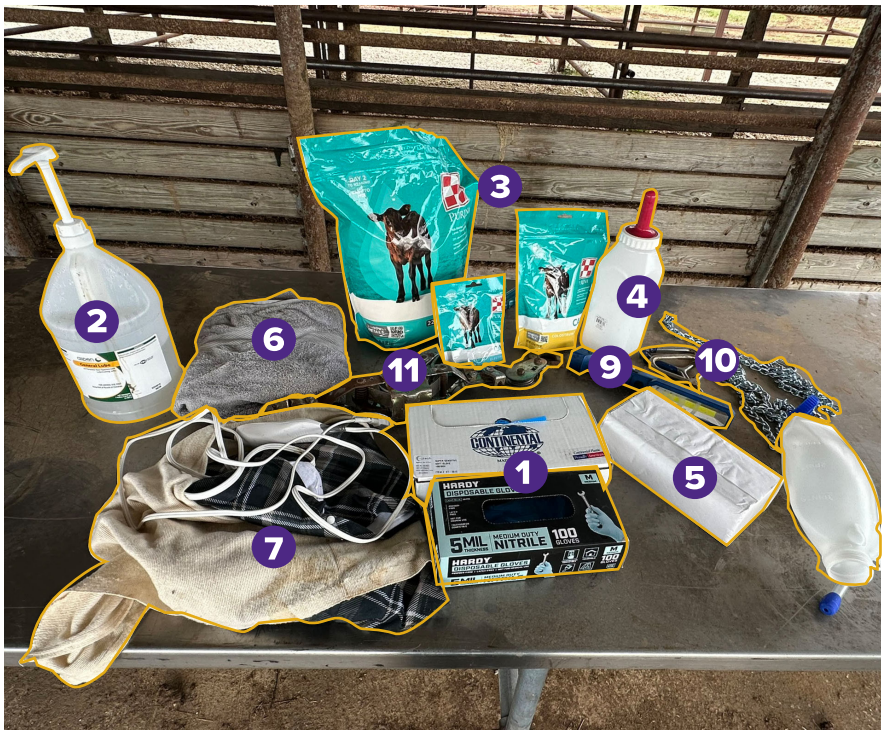

Figure 2. Example of supplies needed for calving season.
Photo by Ashley K. Edwards

Importance of Colostrum

Keeping frozen colostrum and milk is a better option than using powdered replacers. However, this may not be feasible for everyone. If you can keep a small supply in your freezer, make it easily accessible and be sure you have the equipment needed to thaw it properly. Proper thawing is done slowly over the stove or by one-minute bursts in the microwave. Stir periodically and only warm it to approximately 104-110 F. Heating to higher temperatures can break down proteins and other nutrients essential to calves. Ideally a calf receives colostrum within the first six hours of life. At a minimum, the first 12 hours are acceptable. Research shows that a calf's immune system is weakened if colostrum intake occurs outside of the first 12 hours.

Establishing a Protocol

Make sure your calving protocol is up to date, including necessary contact information for your veterinarian and anyone who can assist when needed. Likewise, do not forget to include a plan for cow management following cases of dystocia or nursing difficulties. Take the time to reevaluate your health and management strategies with your veterinarian before the first calf arrives. Review this protocol with employees, family members and anyone else who may be called upon. Preparing supplies, checking equipment and creating a plan of action are important steps towards optimizing a calving season. Some key things to remember are where the calving kit and supplies are located, how long to wait before you intervene, the best methods for pulling a calf and who to call when you need help.

Knowing when to intervene and when to call for help can be difficult. For more information, read Calving: When to Call for Help by Drs. Christine Navarre, Matt Welborn and Chance Armstrong at https://www.lsuagcenter.com/articlespage1485461791656.

Summary

Ensuring your supplies are in order and pens are clean is a major step in preparing for the calving season. In addition to this, work with your veterinarian to maintain a proper herd health protocol, as well as your local extension agent for nutritional needs. A successful calving season requires a wholistic approach that includes the best management practices listed here, as well as proper herd maintenance throughout the year.

For more information, reach out to your local LSU AgCenter Extension office and veterinarian or email Ashley Edwards at akedwards@agcenter.lsu.edu.

References

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