

Calving Time

There are only a few rules that can be used to help a person through calving season. The greatest teacher is experience, and unfortunately you often learn more through your mistakes.

The Stages of Calving are:

Stage 1:

Symptoms of discomfort and restlessness, cow may lie down and get up frequently. The teats may become distended and leak milk. Towards the end of this stage, the water bag is presented and will likely break. These conditions will be observed normally from one to six hours, but up to 24 hours.

Stage 2:

This stage is characterized by the fetus entering the dilated birth canal, rupture of the second water bag, abdominal contractions or labor, and the expulsion of the calf. The cow will initiate abdominal contractions after the feet have entered the cervix or vagina. This may not be observed due to one of the following:

- ❑ If a calf is presented in breech position (tail first, feet down)
- ❑ Twin calves who have not decided who is coming first
- ❑ Head is back and cannot progress into the vagina
- ❑ Uterine torsion
- ❑ Cervical scarring

Intervention is required if stage two is delayed. The time for this second stage of birth in a cow is normally 1-4 hours, while heifers usually require up to 4 hours.

A good general rule of thumb is:

- ❑ Cows should deliver within **one** hour of the water bag breaking, providing they are down working at it
- ❑ Heifers may take a bit longer, but should deliver within **2** hours of a broken water bag

If the animal is taking longer than this, it may be a good idea to check and make sure that the calf is positioned properly and that there are not potential problems.

Stage 3:

This last stage includes expulsion of the placenta, which usually requires ½ to 8 hours. The uterus will then return to its normal size within the next few weeks. A placenta is considered to be retained if it has not been expelled within 12 hours.

Calving Guidelines:

- ❑ Check cows for calving every 3 hours, depending on the weather
- ❑ Once a heifer or cow is in Stage 2 of labour, observe more closely until the calf is delivered
- ❑ Intervene if:
 - In Stage 1 for more than 6 hours
 - In Stage 2 for more than 2 hours, or if trying hard for 30 minutes/1 hour without any appreciable progress
 - If cow or heifer has quit trying for over 20 minutes

Professional Advice is Sought When:

- ❑ Don't know what type of problem you are dealing with
- ❑ You know the problem and the solution, but are unable to handle it (ie oversized calf = c-section)
- ❑ You know the problem and the solution, and have tried but have made no progress in a 30 minute period. Further delays may jeopardize the calf.