

Calving 2011

As each new year starts, I often think of a tradition we have here in Montana called calving. Though we've had a couple of "warm" years, there are always some really cold days and nights in there that can make you feel like it's the worst day so far this year. Here are a few tips on preparing for calving now that will help reduce headaches at 2:30 in the morning on your first night of calving.

- Calving barns: make sure you do a good walk through your calving barns and make sure all the pens, gates, and fences are in good repair. Remember when that tough old biddy busted the gate last year and you were always going to fix it? Now is the time. Also, be sure to check for protruding nails, screws, and wire that might catch on hides. Barns have a habit of shifting over time.
- Equipment: check your medical supplies, gloves, antibiotics, obstetrical chains, calf pullers, and other supplies to make sure 1) that you have what you need, and 2) that the perishables are not past their expiration dates. This last one is especially important with injections. Make sure you stock up on what you need now and you're not using compromised medicine because it's the middle of the night and it's all you have. Also remember that a good light goes a long way. If you plan to use the flashlight you left in the barn last year, does it have new batteries, or will be you cussing all the way to the house for fresh ones?
- Plan: What is your routine? Probably the same as last year. Since you hopefully haven't calved out since March (or June for some of you...you know who you are!). Who is checking heavies? Who do you call when you need help? Do they know that!? I recommend that folks have a written plan that is posted somewhere everyone can see, like the calving barn. Make sure that you are not the only one who knows the plan. I'm not pointing any fingers here.

Calving time always brings back memories for me. I used to ask dad why we had to do it in January, and he seemed to get frustrated when I just didn't understand. I hope you have a great calving year and that 2011 calf prices are even higher than 2010.