

Prime Cuts:

Preventing Diseases During Calving Season

Famo Flier

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The last thing any producer needs in the middle of a busy calving season is a disease outbreak. As always, prevention is better than any medicine. To help you prepare and survive this next calving season, here is a checklist of what to consider:

- *Sanitation* – Make this a priority not only before calving starts, but throughout the season, as well. Ensure all calving equipment is sanitized, including chains and pullers, bottles, nipples, and esophageal feeders before calving season begins and after every use. Barns should be cleaned thoroughly of any manure remaining from last season and should be cleaned regularly during the current season to limit the potential ingestion of fecal material. Manure can contain a plethora of parasites and disease organisms that could easily infect a newborn calf. Clean barns down to the dirt and spread lime down to kill pathogens and dry the soil. Thoroughly bed the area to ensure that the area is dry. Any solid surfaces should be disinfected, this includes calf warmers. If using bleach, make sure to rinse thoroughly and allow to dry. The fumes from bleach can cause respiratory complications in the calf if used improperly.
- *Animal Health* – Work with your veterinarian to develop a suitable vaccination program for your herd. Have a plan for mature cows, first calf heifers, and calves. Ensure that calves ingest colostrum within the first 12 hours. Colostrum contains a dense supply of nutrients and maternal antibodies to promote health and vitality of the calf.
- *Buying In* – It's a fact of ranching that not all calves will survive. Grafting a purchased calf to a cow may be tempting but should be done with caution. Make sure to purchase the calf from a reputable operation with proper calf-rearing and animal health management practices. To prevent possible disease transmission, the purchased calf and cow should be segregated from the herd for a minimum of 10 days.
- *People* – People are dirty. We can carry disease all over the place and not even notice. To limit transmission of disease care for healthy animals before tending to the sick ones or have one person who solely cares for the sick/hospital animals. Clean and disinfect boots, coveralls, and gloves or have second sets of these items for working sick animals. Overall, don't be dirty.
- *Pests* – Rodents and birds (also known as sky rats) are filthy and can carry pathogens on their feet, feathers, fur, and droppings. An effective pest control plan is key to limiting the spread of disease.
- *Death Loss* – If an animal dies in the calving barn dispose of it, along with anything it came in contact with (bedding, milk, manure, feed) within 48 hours. Make sure the disposal area is away from where other animals can come in contact with it. Clean and disinfect the area where the animal died and sterilize any equipment used on that animal.

Overall, use common sense: If it's dirty, clean it. If it's dead, get rid of it. If it's sick, quarantine it.

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