

# Prime Cuts:

## Utilizing the Sandhills Calving Method

Famo Flier

Winter 2015

In preparation for calving season, procedures to promote calf health need to be top priority. One of the main causes of death in young calves is diarrhea. Because of the incubation time for many diarrhea-causing pathogens, death loss typically occurs in 10 – 17 day old calves.

The Sandhills Calving method was developed as a means to limit initial pathogen exposure. Observations of several herds showed a lower incidence of scours in calves born early in the calving season (within the first 2 weeks); however, as the season progressed, more calves would fall ill due to the mounting pathogen load in the pasture. The proposed solution was to recreate the clean environment that was present at the beginning of the season.

### The Method

1. Pastures are divided
2. All cows enter first pasture
3. After 7 – 10 days, all cows that have not calved are moved to a new pasture
4. Repeat every 7 – 10 days until all cows have calved

### Implementation

The beauty of this method is that it can be scaled up or down to match the size of your operation. The concepts are the same, the number of animals and pens needed are the variables. It is a reasonable plan to use, causes little stress to pregnant cows, and is much easier than trying to pair up cows and calves and move them out of the calving pasture. In addition, removing cow/calf pairs does not address the key issue of preventing newborn calf exposure to the pathogen load as it grows in the pasture.

### Calving Pens

Frequent cleaning and bedding of calving pens can help to decrease the bacterial and viral load; however, as the season progresses the pathogen load will likely be growing in conjunction. If rotation through calving pastures is not an option, then it is critical to scrape and re-bed often and thoroughly. Also, no matter what method is used, institute a proper vaccination program. Vaccinating cows late in pregnancy increases the quality of colostrum that upon ingestion gives newborn calves a solid immune boost for their first few weeks of life.

Whatever your situation is, survival and health of the calf are of utmost important. Take time to develop a scours prevention plan that best works for you. Keep in mind, if you have been calving out cows in the same spot for years and have chronically battled scours in your calves, it may be time to relocate your calving area. Allowing a few seasons to pass and the pathogen load to decrease in the soil may be necessary to restore the safety of that area for newborn calves. Keep a look out for early signs of distress in calves and intervene early if there appears to be something wrong. This timetable outlines the progress a calf should make within 2 hours of birth. If calves are not meeting these benchmarks, investigate early and get a vet involved when necessary.

Newborn Calf Timetable	
Within 3 minutes	Hold head upright
Within 5 minutes	In sternal recumbence (laying upright on stomach)
Within 20 minutes	Attempting to stand
Within 60 minutes	Standing on its own
Within 2 hours	Actively nursing