

NORTHWEST VETS NEWSLETTER

August 2010

Tough Calvings: How Can we Prevent Them?

Dr. Jennifer Taylor

For those of you who couldn't attend our Franklin County Discussion Group meeting at the end of July, this newsletter will serve as a short synopsis of what was discussed. We encourage all clients to come to future meetings, and thank those who attended this past month. We hope you had as much fun as we did!

Catch them early: the sooner problem calvings are identified, the more likely a positive outcome!

- Do vaginal as well as rectal exams on due or over-due animals (or dumpy looking dry cows!)
- Is a uterine torsion present? This will need to be corrected quickly.
- Is the calf coming in a normal position? The cow may need assistance.
- Is the calf alive or dead? This can impact how much she will dilate.
- LEARN NORMAL!! The more comfortable you are with what is normal, the better you can be at identifying problems.

Once calving starts, closely observe:

- If no progress has been made after 20 minutes of hard labor, its time to intervene
- If signs of calving stop, its time to intervene
- If you assist the cow in calving and no progress is made in 20 minutes, call us!

J-Lube

- If the cow needs assistance calving, be sure to use a decent lubricant. J-lube is much more slippery than soap, and can greatly help during a calving. By being so slippery, it tends to decrease the risk of tearing a uterus when pulling a calf.

-(A nice trick to clean up J-lube: use Epsom salts and it comes right off!)

Think about breeding to prevent dystocias:

- Use sires with good calving ease scores: remember, the lower the percentage, the better ease of calving. (A 3% calving ease bull is better than a 7% calving ease bull)

-Certain genetic lines (mainly a bull named O-Man) have been shown to have a shorter gestation length by as much as 12 days. These calves are born smaller which lend to easier calvings, yet are just as hardy and will grow to substantial frame size like any other calf.

-Don't breed heifers until they weigh between 800-900 lbs (Holstein) or 500-600 lbs (Jersey). In order to gain enough weight by 13-16 months of age without getting over-conditioned, a proper heifer nutrition program must be in place. Fat is as bad or worse than skinny, so be sure to not overfeed the heifers. Discuss your heifer nutrition program with your nutritionist.

-Bred heifers need to be fed properly throughout the gestation period, as both the fetus and heifer are continually growing. Pre-fresh nutrition is also important, as a proper diet can decrease the incidence of retained placentas, milk fever, and fatty liver.

-80:20 rule: it is 80% management, and 20% genetics that can impact dystocias! Even with great attention to breeding, management is still the priority.

Hopefully this gives you some insight on ways to deal with difficult calvings. Now that you have the calf on the ground, it would be a good time to think about calf health management. Please mark September 23rd on your calendar, when our discussion group will be meeting with Dr. Sam Leadly to discuss calf health management. More information on this upcoming meeting will be mailed to you soon!