

Cows May Keep Better Time Than You Think

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It has been well established by scientific studies that cows fed late in the day are more likely to calve during daylight hours. One such study conducted at Iowa State investigated over 2,000 mature cows and heifers that were either fed late in the day (5 to 10 p.m.) or early in the day (before noon). Of the cows fed late in the day, 85 percent of their calves were born during daylight hours. Yet, only 49.8 percent of the cows fed in the morning calved during daylight hours. Calving during the day allows a better chance for producer intervention should calving trouble occur, decreasing the likelihood of calf death loss.

Recently, researchers from Kansas State University and the University of Idaho have taken another look at calving time.¹ The researchers were interested in identifying a predictable time of day that a cow would give birth year after year. They investigated approximately 200 spring-calving cows at each location. Cows located at the KSU experiment station were fed each day in the late afternoon (4 to 6 p.m.), and cows at the University of Idaho location were fed in the early morning (6 to 8 a.m.). During the calving season, researchers recorded time of

day each cow gave birth by dividing the day into six separate periods of four hours in duration. The periods were 6-10 a.m., 10 a.m.-2 p.m., 2-6 p.m., 6-10 p.m., 10 p.m.-2 a.m. and 2-6 a.m.

Their study results were similar to previous studies in that when cows were fed in the evening, 85.4 percent of cows calved during daylight hours. However, when cows were fed in the morning, only 52.1 percent of cows calved during daylight hours. More importantly, results from this study indicated that cows tended to display very little variation in the time of day they calved from year to year. For cows fed in the evening, the time of day a cow would give birth could be predicted within a two to three hour window based on the average time of day she previously calved. However, cows fed during morning hours exhibited greater variability in the time of day they calved each year. It seems that even though a cow doesn't wear a wristwatch, Mother Nature keeps her fairly regular year after year. Δ

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¹Jaeger et al. Pattern of Parturition as Affected by Time of Feeding and Prediction of the Time of Day That Parturition Will Occur in Spring-Calving Beef Cows. 2008. The Professional Animal Scientist. 24:24753.



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