

# Managing The Calving Season By Altering Feeding Time



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The spring calving season is in full swing for many cow/calf producers. This is an important time of the year; the results of management decisions that occurred several months ago are about to be revealed. Many producers will tell you that this is the most rewarding part of cow-calf production, yet they will also tell you that this time of year is also the most tiring.

Producers can spend a great amount of time observing the cows and heifers to ensure calving proceeds normally. It is especially important to periodically observe first calf heifers and provide assistance when needed. If you anticipate large calves, then it may be necessary to also periodically check them. For me, checking at night was the best time because I am a night owl, but most producers probably prefer a different time. Although you can predict when some cattle will calve, others can be a complete mystery. Thus, increasing the number of cows calving during the daylight hours can be advantageous.

Shifting from nighttime to daytime calving has several advantages. The first obvious benefit is that calving difficulties are much easier to manage when you can see during daylight hours. Second, calves have a longer time to dry off be-

fore the sun goes down. Third, predators are less likely to strike during daylight, especially if you are driving through/by the pasture on a routine basis. And finally, if you have large pastures or wooded areas, calving during the day would make it much easier to find calving cows.

So how can the calving time be shifted? Producers can manipulate calving time by shifting the time of day when cattle are fed. Although the physiological mechanism is not known, review of multiple studies that compared feeding in the morning (any time from 8 to 11 a.m.) versus evening (any time from 5 to 10 p.m.) suggests the following: Feed provided in the morning resulted in parturition that occurred randomly throughout the day, while feed provided in the evening resulted in more cattle giving birth during daylight hours. Additionally, it does not appear that starting the herd nightly feeding one week before calving starts versus two to three weeks earlier had any apparent effect on calving time.

Although feeding in the evening/night may not work for some producers, the advantages noted above may warrant shifting the feed time the week before the start of the calving season. The primary goal is to ensure that calving proceeds normally. With adequate observation time, producers can have a significant impact on reducing calf mortality. Happy calving! Δ

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