Spring tasks for beef cattle producers

Source: Les Anderson, extension beef specialist

Rural Kentucky pastures are beginning to show off spring calves. For cattle producers, this brings in a new cycle of farm management. Farmers have a lot to remember to ensure healthy calves and to successfully rebreed cows.

You need to observe spring calves closely and check them at least twice a day and check your first-calf heifers even more than that. Be ready to assist heifers after one to two hours of hard labor or 90 minutes after the ‘water bag’ is visible. Be prepared to dry and warm chilled calves as soon as possible. Remember that each calf should get colostrum within an hour of birth.

It’s also important to begin to identify calves with ear tags or tattoos while they are still young and easy to handle. Record the birthdate and the dam ID. You need to catrate and implant commercial male calves as soon as possible and you should weigh registered calves within the first 24 hours of birth.

Go ahead and separate cows that have calved and increase their feed. Supplemental energy is important for cows receiving hay to prepare them for rebreeding.

A 1,250-pound cow giving about 25 pounds of milk per day will need about 25 pounds of fescue hay and 5 pounds of concentrate daily to maintain good condition.

If you need to go from a condition score of 4 to 5, you will need to add an additional 2 pounds of concentrate to support that cow. Cows must be in good condition to conceive early in the upcoming breeding season.

Avoid feeding hay in excessively muddy areas of your pasture to avoid contaminating cows’ udders. Calf scours is something you need to watch for in the herd. If scours becomes a problem, you will need to move cows that have not calved to a clean pasture.

Calves with scours may become dehydrated and will need fluids to reverse the situation. You can consult your veterinarian and send fecal samples to the UK Veterinary Diagnostic Lab to determine the most effective drug therapy.

You should plan to vaccinate calves for clostridial diseases like blackleg and malignant edema as soon as possible. It’s also a good time to get yearling measurements on bulls and heifers if necessary, for special sales. You may need to increase bulls’ feed to increase their conditioning for breeding or order semen if you plan to use artificial insemination.

For more information on beef cattle management, contact the (COUNTY NAME) Cooperative Extension Service.

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