

MARCH 2024

Sublette County Ag. & Natural Resources Extension Newsletter

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SUBLETTE COUNTY AG. AND NATURAL RESOURCES EXTENSION

UPCOMING EVENTS:

MARCH

18TH: 4-H YQA, BIG PINEY

26TH: UW HIGH ALTITUDE BULL TEST
AND SALE, LARAMIE

APRIL

1ST: ONLINE YQA DEADLINE FOR THOSE
UNABLE TO ATTEND IN-PERON

22ND-24TH: UW AI CLINIC, HOT SPRINGS
COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS



UNIVERSITY
OF WYOMING

Extension
Sublette County

Newsletter

Highlights and Upcoming Events

**Preventing Calving
Difficulty in your herd**

**Sublette County Hay
Quality Survey**

**University of Wyoming
High Altitude Bull Test &
Sale in Laramie**

Harvest Wyoming

UW AI Clinic

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Extension Webpage](#)**

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PREVENTING CALVING DIFFICULTY IN THE BEEF HERD

As we move closer to spring, many ranchers are prepping for or already entering calving season. This rewarding yet challenging time on the ranch comes with plenty of difficulties and worries, one of which is potential calving difficulties, or dystocia. Most operations expect to deal with dystocia, especially in heifers and younger cows, and have a contingency plan in place. However, as with most things, the best treatment is always prevention. Dystocia can be brought on by several factors, some of which are more difficult to manage than others. This article briefly discusses a few of the factors that we, as producers, can manage to deter calving difficulties.

Replacement Heifers

The largest contributor to dystocia is the age of the cow. In many cases, 2% or less of calving problems occur in mature cows. Studies by the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center in Nebraska showed less than 5% of cows 5 years of age and older required calving assistance, whereas as 54% of 2-year-old heifers experienced difficulty calving.

This proves what many already know: heifers are where the trouble usually comes from. Selecting the right replacements can help curtail that trouble. When it comes to decreasing dystocia, using heifers with proven genetic merit is a good idea. This is often accomplished using the sire's maternal expected progeny differences (EPDs), such as Calving Ease Maternal (CEM). Genomic testing can also be used to predict heifer performance.

Pelvic measurements are another great tool in selecting heifers less likely to need calving assistance. However, a good pelvic measurement will not eliminate dystocia, as it is the relationship between pelvic size and calf weight that influences how easy delivery is. The benefits of a good pelvic area measurement can be negated by a calf that is too big. It is also helpful to keep first-calf heifers close and, if possible, in a separate pasture from mature cows to monitor and assist in birth if needed.

Sire Selection

Many ranchers are well aware of the effect the bull can have on the delivery of the calf. Certain bulls will yield bigger calves that are more likely to cause trouble. The bull's breed is one selection criterion that allows ranchers to influence calf birthweight. Typically, British breeds like Angus and Herefords yield lighter birthweight calves than Continental breeds.

Looking at a bull's EPDs allows a more fine-tuned approach to assess the expected difficulty a sire's calves will pose. Birthweight EPD (BW), expressed in pounds, is the expected difference in a bull's calves at birth, with lower values indicating lower birthweights. Many producers utilize this EPD in selecting bulls to decrease

dystocia, especially for first-calf heifers.

However, birthweight is not the only factor controlling calving ease. Many geneticists suggest focusing instead on the Calving Ease Direct (CED) EPD, as this utilizes BW as well as other factors in its calculation. Calving Ease Direct is the difference in percentage of unassisted births when a sire is bred to first calf heifers. A higher CED value means that when a sire is bred to first-calf heifers, a higher percent are expected to calve without intervention.

Expected progeny differences are a great tool for predicting how much calving difficulty to expect, especially when looking for a sire to pair with heifers.

Nutrition

Generally, pregnant 2-year-old heifers need about nine to 13 pounds of TDN per day. This is greater than a mature pregnant cows' requirement of eight to 12 pounds per day despite their smaller size, because the heifers are still developing themselves while at the same time growing a calf.

A misconception persists that underfeeding cows and heifers during late pregnancy will lead to a smaller calf and lessen the likelihood of calving difficulty. This is not the case. Genetics are the predominant determinant of calf size. Underfeeding the mother can cause her to be weakened at calving, which increases the chance of dystocia.

Research shows that feeding the recommended level of total digestible nutrients (TDN) does lead to a slightly heavier birthweight than underfeeding but does not cause a greater instance of dystocia. Underfeeding will especially hinder 2-year-old heifers pregnant with their first calf by jeopardizing skeletal growth and, therefore, pelvic area. It can also decrease milk yield, increase calf scours, and, most importantly, decrease pregnancy rates the following breeding season.

Research trials at the USDA-ARS research station in Miles City, Montana show the relationship between dystocia and nutrition: cows receiving a low plane of nutrition had higher percentages of dystocia than those on a high plane of nutrition, despite the high plane group having a higher calving weight.

Overfeeding a heifer or cow to the point of obesity can lead to dystocia due to fat obstructing the pelvic canal and hampering her ability to physically strain, but this usually only occurs at a body condition score (BCS) of eight or more. Obese cows are rarely a problem on Wyoming ranches, but both underfeeding and overfeeding can be

monitored by keeping cows and heifers at a body condition score of five to six. For help in determining BCS, the University of Wyoming Extension has published a three-step guide for body condition scoring range cows that can be found at www.wyoextension.org/publications/. This is a simple method of monitoring the nutrition of your herd as a whole.

The battle against dystocia in cattle requires a comprehensive approach, from strategic heifer and sire selection to good nutritional management. There are other factors that determine how likely it is we will have to pull a calf, but understanding how to manage the cow herd can improve our chances of easy births each spring. Even the best management is not bulletproof against dystocia, and calving problems will still rear their head from time to time, so it is best to remain prepared to address the issue when it arises.



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Sublette County Hay Producers: **We need your help!**

The Sublette County Extension Office is seeking to collect hay sample results from willing producers in the area. These will remain completely anonymous and will help us better understand hay quality across Sublette County.

By simply sending lab results for hay you've tested, you will contribute to a comprehensive dataset that will benefit ranchers throughout western Wyoming.

Your participation is vital to the success of this survey! Together, we can enhance our understanding of hay quality in the area and improve livestock nutrition strategies.

Lab reports can be emailed to dmontgo8@uwyo.edu, mailed to PO Box 579 in Pinedale or dropped off at the Extension Office. Please include the closest town, forage species, and irrigation strategy if not specified in the report!

For questions or more information, email Dagan or call (307) 367-4380. Thank you for your support!

SUBLETTE COUNTY EXTENSION VOLUNTARY HAY ANALYSIS SURVEY

The Sublette Extension office is beginning a survey of hay quality across the county. We are asking any hay producer who would be willing to share with us lab reports from hay testing they have done. We would greatly appreciate any help we can get! See the flyer for more details and please feel free to share with others!

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UW HIGH ALTITUDE BULL TEST AND SALE IN LARAMIE

The University of Wyoming will be hosting its second annual High Altitude bull test and sale at the Laramie Research and Extension Center on March 26th (this is a rescheduling of the initial date). This includes an educational field day at 10am and the sale at 1pm. Multiple PAP tested bulls will be available from 12 consignors. Follow UW Beef Extension for updates by clicking the bulls to the left!

HARVEST WYOMING CONFERENCE

Learn how to deal with the difficulties of gardening and producing vegetables in Wyoming. Hear from several speakers and educators about ways to extend your growing season and produce more. Click the image to the right to view the registration site.



UW AI CLINIC IN THERMOPOLIS

UW Extension is hosting an artificial insemination clinic for anyone interested in AI in their own cattle. Spots are limited and registration closes April 12th. Click the calf to the left to see the Facebook page with contact and registration info.