

5 Preparation Tips for Beef Calving Season

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Calving season on a beef operation often involves late, cold nights and tracking down pregnant cows with a flashlight.

Making sure you, your facilities and your team are adequately prepared for calving season is a must to ensure a smooth calving process and that your cows and heifers give birth to healthy calves. Beef producers need to get their records in order, make note of expected calving dates and get their labor arranged so team members know what they are doing and when they are doing it.

When it comes to preparing for calving season, there are three time frames that beef producers need to have in mind: 90 days prior, 30 days prior and two weeks prior to calving season.

Ninety Days Prior to Calving Season

Three months ahead of calving season is the time to ensure that cows' immune systems are prepared for the stress ahead of them. Planning ahead yields benefits to both the cow and newborn calf.

Tip 1: Review and Outline Cattle Vaccination Programs with a Veterinarian

If vaccines are going to be administered to cows prior to calving season, those should be discussed 90 days prior to calving. Many vaccines require an initial vaccination and a revaccination separated by at least a couple weeks. The revaccination will need to take place anywhere from three to six weeks prior to the expected calving date. Getting started 90 days early will give beef producers plenty of time to administer both vaccinations.

Tip 2: Make Sure Your Pregnant Cows and Heifers Are Receiving Trace Mineral Supplements

Beef cattle should be receiving performance trace minerals from Availa® 4 year-round and, ideally, there shouldn't be any reason for producers to make a change in this regard. If cows have not been receiving performance trace mineral supplementation, however, producers should start including Availa 4 in their beef cow nutrition program no later than 90 days prior to calving season.

Learn more: [Importance of Supplementing Performance Trace Minerals Year-Round in Beef Nutrition](#)

Thirty Days Prior to Calving Season

The new calf crop is just around the corner and there will be calves on the ground within a couple of weeks. When the work begins, beef producers don't want to be trying to determine the identity of their cows to match them with records, and they definitely don't want to be hunting for the proper supplies. It's time to get the house in order.

Tip 3: Check Cattle Ear Tags or Brand

Make sure cows and heifers have good visual ID, whether it's an ear tag or a brand. Cross-check visual IDs with records and projected calving dates to make sure everything matches up and that a plan is in place for when cows and heifers need to be moved closer to the calving area.

Tip 4: Review Your Calving Supply Checklist and Supply Stock

Beef producers should check their supply stock about 30 days before they expect calving season to start, especially since it is not uncommon for heifers to calve one or two weeks ahead of their projected calving date. Making sure everything is accounted for ahead of time eliminates the need to scramble at the last minute.

Common **cattle supplies** to have on-hand as calving season approaches include:

- Iodine spray for navels
- Flashlight or spotlight for checking cows in the pasture
- Ear tags for calves
- Postnatal treatments like pastes or boluses
- Scale (if calves need to be weighed)
- Oral calf feeder (tube feeder)
- Premolac® Colostrum Replacer (one to two bags on hand)
- Electrolyte packets
- Calf milk bottle
- AI sleeves and lubricant in case any palpation is required
- Latex gloves
- OB chains and calf jack
- Any supplies for winter calving — calf warming box, calf jackets, calf earmuffs (or old panty-hose or shirt sleeves to keep ears warm against the calf's neck),
- Bucket/tank heaters if cows are to be kept inside for extended periods of time
- Veterinarian contact information

Two Weeks Prior to Calving Season

Now that beef producers have boosted cows’ immune systems, animals are properly identified and supplies have been gathered, the final step is to prepare the maternity areas. By starting early, beef producers will have their facilities ready for the influx of animals that could begin arriving any day.

Tip 5: Prepare Designated Cattle Calving Pens

Ensure calving pens have been constructed, cleaned and bedded no later than two weeks before calving season begins. Calving can take place indoors in a barn or outdoors in a designated calving area. In either case, the designated calving areas need to be clean and dry, bedded and ready to go. Feedstuffs and water for dams, as well as colostrum replacer for calves (as needed), should also be close by.

Performance Trace Mineral Supplements Improve Calving Success

Feeding performance trace minerals from Availa 4 helps ensure cows are in an appropriate mineral status and producing high-quality colostrum to provide the calf with improved passive immunity early in life. Supplementing beef cow nutrition programs with Availa 4 year-round, including prior to calving season can also help provide a calf with trace mineral nutrition before its born, helping it build a competent immune system and reducing the incidence of infections like bovine respiratory disease. To learn more about including Availa 4 as a part of your beef cattle nutrition program year-round, contact your Zinpro representative today.