

Cattle Business in Mississippi – September 2015
“Beef Production Strategies” article

Game On - A Successful Season Starts with a Live Calf

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Where did summer go? From the 47th Beef Improvement Federation Annual Meeting and Research Symposium to the Homeplace Producers Feeder Calf Sale, this summer seemed to fly by! While the calendar pages seemed to flip fast, the heat seemed to be endless. Hopefully by now we have seen a break in the soaring temperatures and humidity. By the time this issue of *Cattle Business in Mississippi* has made it to your mailbox, football fanatics across the country will be gearing up for the first game. In last month's column we discussed similarities between the preparations of a cow/calf producer and football coach for an upcoming season. No matter the amount of preparation we put in, there are always some upsets along the way. For now, we have no losses and the chance of an undefeated season or 100% calf crop is still within reach!

For cow/calf producers, a successful calving season begins with a live calf. Research has shown that cattle in the 7th and 8th month of gestation who become heat stressed tend to calve early. I am sure if your cows were bred to calve September 1, you probably had an August calf or two. On my family's farm in Northwest Alabama, we had one three weeks early. Dr. David Patterson from the University of Missouri Extension explains that cows under heat stress reduce blood flow to the uterus and triggers pre-mature calving. Another theory that could contribute to added heat stress is poor quality pastures. When pasture grasses have a high fiber content and low energy, more heat will be produced in the rumen during digestion. While an early birth might be indicative of a lower birth weight it is often accompanied by a host of other complications.

One of the most common problems with calves being born in extreme heat is un-thriftiness. A newborn calf will get heat stressed relatively fast. We have had heifers and cows to seclude themselves in the pasture, have a calf, then retreat to the pond for a dip before licking the calf off. Last year, we had a first calf heifer to calve in the pond. Luckily, we saw the calf hit the water as we were pulling up in the driveway from church. Our old home basically shared a driveway with the church so the good folks at Walter Baptist saw me dive into the pond to retrieve the calf – it survived so I have no shame. Timing is everything during this time of year.

On our farm we try to be sure that every calf is sprayed for flies as soon after birth as possible. We also spray navel cords with an Iodine (wound spray) mixture. Science is mixed on whether or not this is effective, but we have never had a case of navel ill (knock on wood). I feel as if the fly spray is imperative. We buy our fly spray in an aerosol can so it is easy to apply and will spray a few feet.

As beef producers, there is really nothing we can do about the hot temperatures, but we can decrease heat stress in our calving cows by providing shade and adequate nutrition. Quick and timely care of newborn calves is crucial during hot weather. I hope you have a winning calving record this fall!

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For more information about beef cattle production, contact an office of the Mississippi State University Extension Service.