

# One Born Every Minute - Calving

## Practical Guide

Regardless of the scale of your enterprise, calving is one of the most important times of the year for cattle breeders.

### The signs...

Signs of calving may be present for some time before the actual process takes place, this includes restlessness and separating themselves from the group. Cows should calve in less than 4 hours if the calf appears to be coming normally, heifers may take a bit longer.

First of all, regularly look for cows or heifers showing signs of calving. Usually a cow that is in labour will find a secluded spot away from the rest of the herd to calve. Then, observe what stage of birth she's in. When she is very close, you will see a water bag hanging down from her vulva. Usually, soon after the water bag is visible, both the front feet will appear, soon followed by the nose. A calf in normal presentation will have both feet out with the base of the feet pointing to the ground. If no progress is seen during any stage of calving, assistance may be required.



### Our Practical Guides cover these useful topics:

- The signs
- Calving kit
- When to intervene
- Examination
- Assisting the cow
- Post Partum Care

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### When to intervene

- If only the head, one leg or the back legs are presented
- The water bag has passed and no progress is made in 30 minutes
- Unproductive straining for more than 30minutes
- When the calving taking more than 2 hours

### Examining the calving cow

#### 1. External

You will get a lot of information from what you can (or can't) see on the outside of the cow.

What is visible?

- Head
- Leg(s)
- Water bag

(Do not break the bag if it is intact until you have established what is going on.)

It is also important to observe the cows behaviour

### Calving Kit

- Clean hands!
- Clean, waterproof clothing, arm-length plastic gloves
- Plenty of sterile lubricant gel
- Disinfectant
- Halter or crush to restrain the cow
- Medicines – discuss with your vet
- Thermometer
- Stomach Tube
- Colostrum (frozen/powdered)
- Calcium and Magnesium
- Calving Jack and Calving ropes



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## Examining the calving cow continued...

### 2. Internal

If the cow is taking a long time or there is clearly an issue it may be worth having a feel inside. Hands and arm must be clean, use a arm length sterile glove. The hand and arm should be covered with lubricant.

- Can you feel a calf?

Feel inside the vagina to establish presence of calf. Feel also for how lubricated it is. Dryness may indicate the cow has been trying to calve for a long time.

- Is the cervix open?

The cow may not be ready or there could be an issue. If in doubt give another 30 minutes and re-check.

- Front Leg vs Back Leg?

You can tell the front legs from the back legs by the way they bend. The front leg joints bend the same way (forms a U-shape). The back leg joints flex in opposite directions (forming a Z-shape). Look at front and hind legs on a live calf until you are confident in the difference.

- Do all legs belong to the same calf?

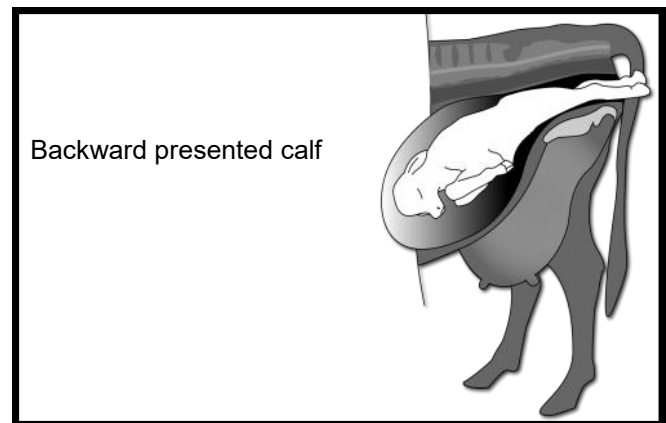
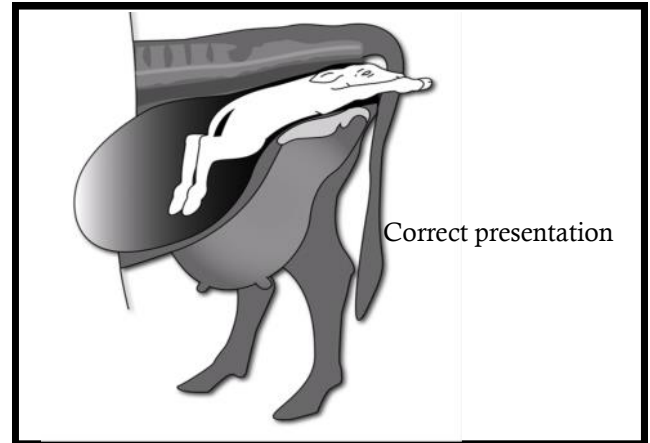
Twins increase the chance of calving difficulties. Pregnancy Diagnosis (PD) can help predict this and then these cattle can be monitored. Follow one leg up inside along the body and attempt to continue to follow to determine whether the legs present are from the same calf.

- Is the calf alive?

If you can locate the calf's mouth, gently use your finger to see if the calf suckles on it. If the head is out gently tap on the outside of the eye and life will be indicated by blinking. Gently pulling on a limb and being met with a slight pull back from the calf is also a sign of life.

- How do you deliver a calf that needs a bit of help?

If the calf is in the correct position (head and feet first) but the cow is taking a long time to deliver, pull on front two legs if it is safe to do so. With a bit of help the calf should come out. It is best to pull when the cow is straining and relax when she relaxes. Calving ropes can be used to assist with this and lubricant can also be helpful to make it easier for both yourself and the cow.



If the Calf is unable to be born naturally or if a natural birth would cause harm to the cow or calf then a caesarean section may need to be carried out by your vet.

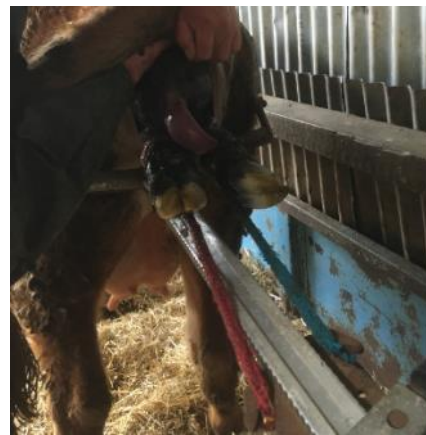
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## Assisting the cow

When examining or assisting the cow it is important that she is safely restrained both for the people and the cows health and safety. A calving gate or crush would be ideal but if these are not available a rope halter could be used.

If she needs a helping hand, put a set of calving ropes on the legs of the calf above the fetlock joint. Pull out and down when the cow is straining, and rest when the cow is not straining. If you cannot pull the calf out using ropes then it may be necessary to use a calving jack, although be careful of how quick you pull the calf out, as you could easily cause more damage if not handled correctly. It's important to decide if the risk of harm to the foetus and dam is justified by using the calving jack.

Frequent and/or violent spontaneous foetal movements are a sign of distress. This is often due to hypoxia (lack of oxygen) and acidosis (body fluids too acidic). This is a poor prognostic indicator and denotes the need for urgency. For more tricky positions, unless an experienced calver it may be best to call your vet to advise the best course of action



## Post-partum Care

- Make sure calf is breathing right away – clean out the calf's nose and mouth, tickle its nose with a piece of straw to make it shake its head or sneeze
- Always check for injury to the cow and calf e.g. bleeding
- Check cow for colostrum and urge calf to start suckling - It is essential the calf gets 4l of colostrum within the first 6 hours of life to kick start its immune system and reduce disease incidence in its first few weeks of life
- Dip the calves navel in iodine
- Medicines to cow if required
- Make sure there is some food and water for the cow to replenish energy & hydration after this stressful ordeal.
- Watch for the foetal membrane being expelled, this should happen within 12 hours after birth of the calf

If in doubt at any time phone your vet for Advice



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