



Calving in General

By Anthony Carver, UT Extension Grainger County Agent

It is important to know or revisit the basics when thinking about calving in our beef herd. First and foremost, everyone needs to understand how long a cow is pregnant. The term “Gestation Period” refers to the length of time that an animal carries the offspring.

The Gestation Period for cattle is, on average, 283 days. So, if the math is done correctly: 283 divided by 30 days = 9.4 months of pregnancy. A gestation table is a very useful tool to have on hand. It helps pinpoint the timeframe that a calf should be expected. I have included one such table in this publication.

GESTATION TABLE | Based on a gestation period of 283 days

BRED	DUE	BRED	DUE	BRED	DUE	BRED	DUE	BRED	DUE
JAN 1	OCT 10	MAR 22	DEC 30	JUN 1	MAR 11	AUG 15	MAY 25	OCT 29	AUG 8
JAN 8	OCT 17	MAR 29	JAN 6	JUN 8	MAR 18	AUG 22	JUN 1	NOV 1	AUG 11
JAN 15	OCT 24	APR 1	JAN 9	JUN 15	MAR 25	AUG 29	JUN 8	NOV 8	AUG 18
JAN 22	OCT 31	APR 8	JAN 16	JUN 22	APR 1	SEP 1	JUN 11	NOV 15	AUG 25
JAN 29	NOV 7	APR 15	JAN 23	JUN 29	APR 8	SEP 8	JUN 18	NOV 22	SEP 1
FEB 1	NOV 10	APR 22	JAN 30	JUL 1	APR 10	SEP 15	JUN 25	NOV 29	SEP 8
FEB 8	NOV 17	APR 29	FEB 6	JUL 8	APR 17	SEP 22	JUL 2	DEC 1	SEP 10
FEB 15	NOV 24	MAY 1	FEB 8	JUL 15	APR 24	SEP 29	JUL 9	DEC 8	SEP 17
FEB 22	DEC 1	MAY 8	FEB 15	JUL 22	MAY 1	OCT 1	JUL 11	DEC 15	SEP 24
MAR 1	DEC 9	MAY 15	FEB 22	JUL 29	MAY 8	OCT 8	JUL 18	DEC 22	OCT 1
MAR 8	DEC 16	MAY 22	MAR 1	AUG 1	MAY 11	OCT 15	JUL 25	DEC 29	OCT 8
MAR 15	DEC 23	MAY 29	MAR 8	AUG 8	MAY 18	OCT 22	AUG 1	* NOT ACCOUNTING FOR LEAP YEAR	

The best way to use the table is as follows. A producer enters the field to see cow number 10 bulling. The farmer notes that it is February 1st and consults the gestation table. The producer then sees that they should expect a calf somewhere near November 10th. Then the farmer puts that information in their records.

Signs of Heat is another topic which should be visited. Cows cannot get bred without them going through an estrogen cycle (heat). As producers, we need to be able to recognize the signs of heat.

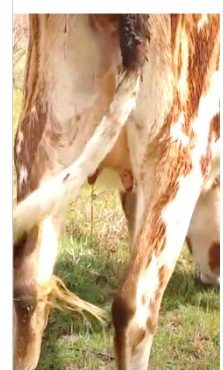
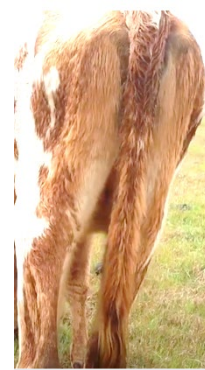
- Ride others
- Moist, swollen, red vulva
- Clear mucus discharge from vulva
- Grazing less
- Back arched and tail in air
- Nervous, excitable, restless
- Lag behind or lead (change in pecking order)
- Stand to be ridden



Preg Checks are extremely important. The 2025 numbers suggest that it is over \$800 to maintain an animal all year. If the cow is open (non-pregnant), how is she going to pay you back for your \$800 investment into her? The answer is that.... she ain't! The common rule of thumb is to cull open cows after the breeding season and use the money to invest in more fertile animals. Therefore, preg checks are a wonderful tool to save the producer money.

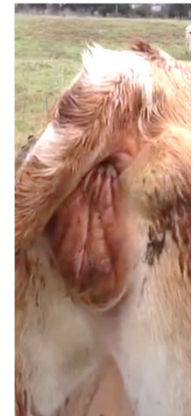
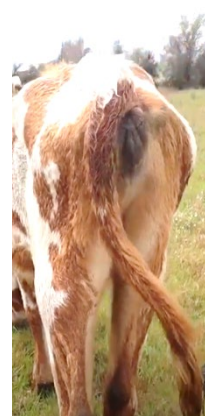
Knowing the Signs of a Calf Coming Soon is always useful. These are tips that can help pinpoint the timeframe of a birth. These signs work best with a positive preg check and a gestation table due date.

- Udder Bags Up – milk drop
- Teat Swell
- Behavior Change
 - Uneasy, Restless
 - Stand Ups and Lay Downs Frequently
 - Nervous
 - Licks Stomach
 - Digs on Ground
 - Distances Themselves from Herd
 - Moves to High Point in Field(maybe)
- Springing
- Pin Drop



Above:
Animal 1 shows no sign of bag up or teat swell

Animal 2: Notice the utter filling up and the teats have elongated, swelled and pointing outward slightly



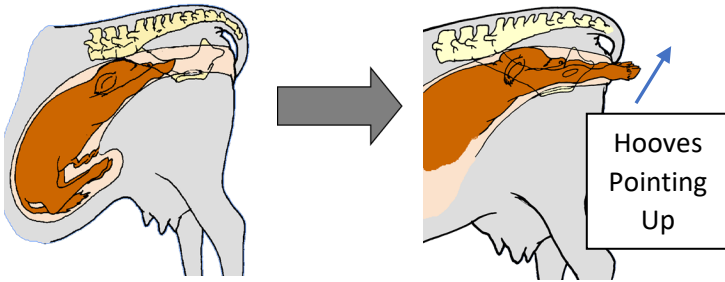
Springing is a term the old-timers used to describe the swell that an animal gets when getting nearer to calving. The left animal doesn't have much springing, while the animal on the right is springing. First-time calvers can spring earlier (sometimes weeks before).



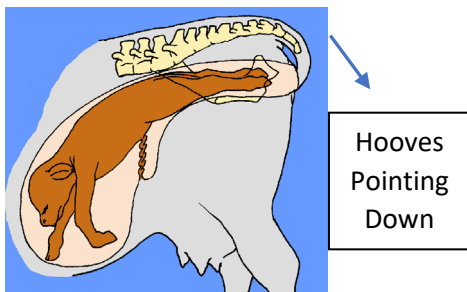
Pin Drop is the general term for the muscles around the tail head that relax for the calf to be born.

Calf Presentation

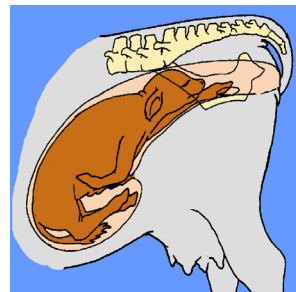
Normal Calf Presentation



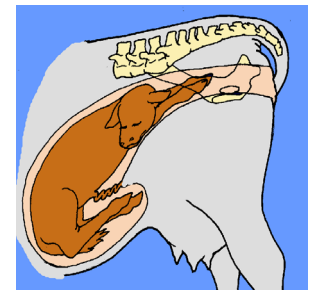
Normal is 2 hooves and a nose in between. The hooves should be pointing up. See picture to left. Anything other than a normal presentation should be treated with extreme care. In other words, call the Vet!



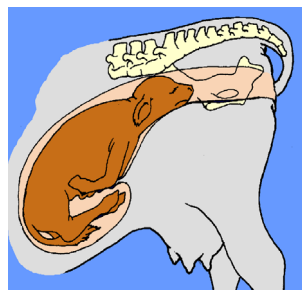
Backwards



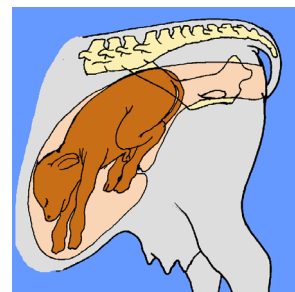
One Leg Back



Head Back



Two Legs Back



Breech

When to help? Has always been a question about animals at birthing time. The short answer is quicker than later. Once you notice an animal in labor, one should notice as many details as possible.

There should be noticeable progress every 30 minutes. One does not know how long the female has been trying from first notice. Therefore, if no progress happens in 30 minutes a call to the vet to put them on standby would be wise. If you see hooves notice the presentation of the calf using the above pictures.