



Agricultural Services

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Why's of Agriculture: Why is Spring "Calving Season"?

By Aimee Delaney, PAL Coordinator

It's getting closer to one of the most busy, sleep deprived, yet exciting times of a cattle producer's year; Calving season! But why do most cattle producers calve in the late-winter/spring? It's a big question with a lot of components to take into consideration: timing, gestation (pregnancy length), feed/food availability, growing seasons, crop seeding and harvesting, markets, and many others. Let's take a leisurely dip into why.

Did you know that similarly to humans, cows are pregnant for about 9 months before having a bull calf (male) or a heifer calf (female)? Also like humans, the health and wellbeing of the mother cow is crucial for the health and wellbeing of the calves. Which is why after a long summer with the bulls, everyone comes home, is sorted (bulls into one pen, cows and calves organized into others') and fed like kings and queens off the feed their farmers and ranchers acquired throughout the rest of the year for the remainder of the winter months, paying special attention to the soon-to-be mothers.

Also like humans, you can often determine roughly when the calf will be born (usually just one, sometimes more) but the exact day/time is unknown. This is where the sleep deprivation comes in. Farmers and ranchers will check on their cows regularly (may be as often as every 2-4 hours depending on the weather conditions and barn availability) to make sure they are available for oversight and assistance if needed in the birthing process. Depending on the amount of cows a producer has, this can be a very lengthy couple of weeks or months.

As the temperatures rises the growing season is right around the corner. Cattle can be moved to pasture where grass is plentiful, and because the farmers and ranchers aren't bringing feed to their cows daily they have more time to get their field work done; hay/crop seeding/harvesting, preparing for the next winter to come. This also plays into the marketing of cattle and beef consumption during the summer months.

For all cattle producers the health and wellbeing of their cattle is their livelihood. While modern technology is improving many ways in which cattle producers are able to take care of their cows, many of these folks have stories showcasing their dedication to their cows. Many farmers will remember a time they slept in the barn, did CPR on a calf at 2'oclock in the morning, or took one in the house to warm up in the tub – I call these bathtub stories.

So why is most calving done in the spring? Timing. Spring gives producers a chance to bring their most valuable assets (the calves) into the world with potential to thrive and grow. It also gives these folks time for their other time-sensitive field work during the rest of the year and allows for time dedicated to the cattle markets.

Each month we'll dig into a new 'Why?' of agriculture. If you have an agricultural question you'd like me to dig into let me know at adelaney@rdcounty.ca



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Please note: All farms and ranches differ in many ways and calve at various times of the year dependant on the particular farmer or rancher, and their operation and operational goals. What may be appropriate for one may not be appropriate for all. These are generalizations based off the average cattle operation during the average year.

Also note: the terms farmers, ranchers and producers are often used interchangeably.



Minutes old, this calf and her mother are pretty cozy on a bed of straw with a steady rotation of treats on supply for Mom (otherwise known as hay bales and pellets) and of course milk from Mom for the baby calf.