

Sandhills Calving System

We often see the worst cases of scours when the environment favors virus, bacterial, and protozoal resilience *and* stresses or challenges the immune system of our animals. Suboptimal conditions, such as large fluctuations in temperature from day to night, high moisture, muddy conditions and a lot of pathogens (viruses, bacteria, or protozoa) in the environment oftentimes lead to calf scours. No matter how good a calf's immune system, as the number of pathogens present increases so does the likelihood that a calf will be exposed to the pathogen for a period of time that will initiate disease. One of the most important steps in combating disease is to decrease the number of pathogens and duration the calf will be in contact with pathogens. The Sandhills Calving System was designed to do just that.

The Goals of the Sandhills Calving System

1. Prevent pathogen/calf contact by using clean calving pastures.
2. Prevent direct contact between younger and older calves.
3. Prevent later born calves (youngest calves) from being exposed to an accumulation of pathogens in the environment.

The Sandhills Calving System accomplishes these goals by routinely moving pregnant cows to new calving pastures. All calves within a given pasture are of similar age, pathogen load will be decreased, and calves will have decreased chance of scours

Initially, all cows were moved into pasture 1 when the first calf is born. After one week, pregnant cows are moved to pasture 2, leaving pairs in pasture 1. After a week of calving in pasture 2, pregnant cows are moved to pasture 3, leaving pairs in pasture 2. Each subsequent week, pregnant cows are moved to fresh pasture and pairs remain in the pasture they were born in. The result is multiple pastures with calves that are within one week of age of each other. After the youngest calf is 4 weeks old, all cattle are brought to a common pasture.

Further modifications of the Sandhills Calving system can be implemented in order to further decrease pathogen exposure to newborn calves - decreasing morbidity, mortality, and veterinary expenses.

Modifications to consider:

- Shorten the period of time that calving occurs in a given pasture. Determine length of time in pasture based on number of calves born (for example, move pregnant animals every two weeks or after every 100th birth).
- Time spent per pasture should also be based on calving pasture. Smaller calving pastures should be used for a shorter period of time since pathogen concentration can build up rapidly.
- Isolate sick calves and their cows to a separate field or area to avoid the accumulation of pathogens in a primary calving pasture.
- Other modifications can be developed based on factors that are unique to your ranch.

By implementing a management plan that reduces exposure of young calves to high pathogen concentrations, cattlemen can effectively reduce calf scours *and* save significant treatment expenses.