NEWBORN CALVES RESPOND TO GOOD MANAGEMENT

W. Warren Gill
Professor
Animal Science
University of Tennessee

Producers who have watched a calf for its first few hours of life know that bovine babies have an almost miraculous determination to survive. Most calves will make it, even in tough weather if born to healthy dams, but good management can result in saving more calves.

Following are some tips for saving calves:

- **Calve in a clean place.** Clean sod is excellent; so is a cedar or pine thicket. Mud is tough on calves in and more calves will survive if cows can deliver in areas protected from direct blasts of cold wind.
- **Observe frequently.** Watch for isolation behavior and other signs of calving. If possible, check the herd every three hours.
- **Be prepared**. Have a clean bucket with the following items: disinfectant, lubricant, towel, flashlight and obstetrical chain. Additional equipment, such as a calf puller, is useful if producers are confident in correct usage.
- **Know when to assist**. Refer to Tennessee Cow-Calf Handbook Publication SR-1002 (Coping with Calving Difficulties) for information about the stages of labor and when to intervene. In general, cows should be given about two hours to deliver the calf and heifers may be given a little longer.
- **Know when to call the veterinarian.** Even experienced cattlemen may face situations where a veterinarian is necessary. Waiting too long to call the vet often yields disappointing results.
- **Watch the baby.** Make sure the calf is breathing, the cow accepts and cleans it, it stands, finds the teat and successfully nurses. This sounds like a lot, but it often happens in less than an hour. If any of these do not happen on schedule, be prepared to assist.

Refer to Tennessee Cow-Calf Handbook Publication SR3001 (Management of the Beef Cow Before, During and After Calving) for additional information.