

## Coaching Guide 16

# Recognising calving cows and heifers

### **Aim: To have your employee familiar with observing and handling calving cows and newborn calves and recognising the signs of a calving cow having trouble**

At the end of this coaching session, employees will be able to describe the calving process, what a calving cow looks like and when a calving cow requires assistance. They will be able to handle milking a freshly calved cow and behave appropriately in the situation to keep the cow calm. The employee will appreciate the potential difference between handling a freshly calved cow and heifer. Finally, the employee will be able to assess a newborn calf for health, respond if they observe a calf having problems, and assist in transporting the newborn calf to the calf pen.

#### **Before coaching starts**

**Does your employee have prior knowledge or experience in working with calving cows?**

**When is the best time for this coaching session – when will cows be calving?**

**Set aside time to take your new employee to the springer paddock** to look at cows on the point of calving. Getting the timing right to see calvings occur may take a bit of flexibility.

**Prepare yourself to explain, demonstrate and then observe to provide feedback on**

- How to recognise and report a calving cow – including knowing which calving cows may need assistance
- How to handle fresh cows
- How to assess and handle newborn calves and take them to their pen using the calf trailer

#### **COVID-19**

- Reinforce PPE use, personal hygiene and cleaning/disinfection of shared surfaces after each use
- Ensure the farm COVID-19 protocol for how to work with other team members is followed, including during the coaching session

## Recognising a calving cow and if she may need assistance

- ❑ Head to the springer paddock so as the following is described, you can point out features on cows. Get the employee to point out things to you that they are observing in the calving herd.
- ❑ Describe the signs of calving:
  - First stage of labour up to 6 hours in cows (12 hours in heifers). Signs are:
    - separating from the herd
    - tail lifting and swishing
    - mild kicking at her belly
    - increased lying down and getting up
    - presence of 'water-bag' at the vulva
  - Second stage of labour 0.5 to 4 hours. Signs are:
    - the cow will have visible abdominal contractions ('straining')
    - the water bag breaks
    - the calf enters the birth canal (either 'head first' or 'breech') and is born.
- ❑ Talk the employee through what action you want them to take (and why) in reporting a calving cow – who to tell – the herd manager? The calf rearer?
- ❑ A cow should be examined to see if she needs calving assistance:
  - she takes longer than 6 hours in first stage of labour
  - is not showing signs of progress during the second stage of labour
  - has only one calf leg, or a calf head or a calf tail showing – check several times a day and record all cow numbers showing first and second stage labour.
  - Watch for cows stealing new calves. be aware of what a recent calved cow looks like vs a cow on the point of calving. Discuss mis-mothering and dealing with dead calves. it's all about discussion and awareness raising.

Calving cow	<p><b>What are the signs that a cow is about to calve?</b></p> <p><b>Describe some characteristics of a calving cow?</b></p> <p><b>How to recognise downer cows?</b></p>
Report a calving cow	<p><b>Why do we report a calving cow? Who do we report it to?</b></p>
Report a down cow	<p><b>Why do we report a down cow?</b></p>
Assisting a calving cow	<p><b>What would you observe that makes you think a cow may need assistance?</b></p> <p><b>Who can assist with difficult calving?</b></p> <p><b>If you observe a calving cow that requires assistance, what do you do?</b></p>

## Handling calving and freshly calved cows

- ❑ Talk about the behaviour of calving and recently calved cows (being aware new mums can be agitated or aggressive)
- ❑ Demonstrate milking new mums according to your farm's protocol
  - washing and drying teats – that might be tight and sore

- putting on cups gently and adjusting if needed
- collecting colostrum
- using teat spray
- Remind your new employee about how freshly calved cows are marked (location and colour used)
- Ask them to enter the required records for some fresh cows and their calves (how, details required for entry)

Behaviour of freshly calved cows	<b>Why do you need to be very careful around a freshly calved cow?</b>
Milking freshly calved cows	<b>Where does the milk from a newly calved cow go?</b>
Marking freshly calved cows	<b>What colour do we use to mark a newly calved cow?</b>
Record keeping	<b>What do we record when a cow has a calf?</b>

## Assessing and handling newborn calves

- Demonstrate how to assess and handle newborn calves calmly, gently and with care. Cover off on:
  - A normal calf should:
    - Take its first breath in 30 seconds
    - Lift its head in one to two minutes
    - Roll onto its chest in two minutes
    - Attempt to stand in 15 minutes
    - Begin shivering in 30 minutes
    - Be standing in one hour
    - Be suckling in two hours
  - If a calf is not behaving normally, assistance includes
    - Putting the calf on its chest with the hind legs pulled forward on either side of the body
    - Clearing mucous from its nostrils and mouth
    - Stimulating breathing by rubbing the calf's body, pinching or tickling the nostrils
    - If it is cold, find some way of warming it up - blankets, hay, heater, etc.
    - Reporting that the calf needs assistance to the calf rearer
- Demonstrate lifting/loading calves onto the calf trailer safely and gently and taking them to their pen, according to your farm protocols around newborn calves.
- Observe the employee making observations of the newborn calves and lifting/loading them – provide feedback on whether accurate.

Handling a newborn calf	<b>What should you look out for when assessing a newborn calf?</b>
	<b>How do we identify newborn calves?</b>
Lifting a newborn calf	<b>Show me how you would safely and gently lift a calf and out of the calf trailer.</b>
	<b>How much does a baby calf weigh?</b>