

News Column

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CALVING MANAGEMENT SCHOOL – DECEMBER 10

My recommendation to anyone planning to attend the calving management school on December 10 in Blue Rapids is to bring your spouse and teenager along. You know they both like to give advice during stressful moments, so it might as well be good advice.

On the McClure farm, I was the one who most often got the command to get my boots on and get out to the barn. The signal that there was trouble usually started with the slamming of the outside porch door. Then I would hear the stomp, stomp, stomp of Dad's heavy boots crossing the porch, heading to the kitchen door. Next, the kitchen door would open and Dad would bellow, "Greg, get out here! I need help pulling a calf."

By the time I was in high school, Mom had long before ceased helping with any and all cattle jobs. Apparently she walked away in the middle of a cattle sorting job and never felt the need to be yelled at again.

Dad didn't mellow much after losing his first helper – we got yelled at too occasionally – but we eventually learned how to survive. There were three boys. I was the youngest and the farm jobs quickly got handed down to me. I still don't know if it was because I had a true interest in farming, or the other boys just never learned to work with dad.

We all reacted differently when Dad got stressed. I learned pretty quickly that my job was to shut up and do what I was told when we were pulling a calf. My brothers didn't always handle the urgency so well and maybe took it a little harder when Dad got loud. I, on the other

hand, learned when to be quiet and when to fight back and we got along pretty well.

During the stress of a difficult delivery was not the time to fight back. My job was to crank the handle on the calf puller, applying pressure when Dad said to apply pressure and letting up when he said to let up. Not much thinking required. He just needed dependable, somewhat strong, and quiet help.

Now, if I had attended a calving school before we bred that first set of Angus cows to Simmental bulls or before we bred those first half-blood heifers back to Simmental bulls, I might not have been the kind of help Dad wanted. I was a teenager; I probably would have tried to tell him how to do his job.

Seriously though, knowledge is a good thing, and Dad and I could have both benefitted from attending a calving management school. I have helped host three or four of these events since leaving the farm and I learn something each time that I wish I had known 35 years ago.

Dr. Dave Rethorst, DVM will be the featured speaker at the upcoming Calving Management School, scheduled for 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 10 at the Marshall County Fairgrounds in Blue Rapids. Rethorst will talk about the normal calving process, when to intervene, and how to manage a difficult birth.

Talking is great, but I'm one who needs to see things, so this is my kind of meeting. Rethorst will demonstrate delivery techniques using the Beef Cattle Institute's model cow, the same simulator cow that you may have seen at the Kansas State Fair. The model cow has one side cut out so you can see the calf and observe the process you might follow to deliver the calf successfully.

Dr. Sandy Johnson, Northwest Area Livestock Specialist, will deliver an important part of the program, discussing the impact of winter feeding decisions on calving and calf survival.

Johnson is better known as the state's beef cow and heifer synchronization guru, but she's pretty good nutritionist too. I'm sure we'll learn a lot.

If you'd like to attend the workshop, you may RSVP to anastasia@ksu.edu, or to sriffey@ksu.edu. The meal is partially sponsored, so your cost is just \$5 per person. You can pay when you get there, but reservations are needed by December 2.

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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