

News Column

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Night Feeding

I felt like a kid at 4-H Camp again,...at Rock Springs 4-H Center. In my mind I had walked down the hill, across the old wooden bridge, past the swimming pool and water wheel, through the craft center, across the creek and through the woods, and there I stood, waiting my turn at the archery range.

At the archery range I listened intently to the instructions, then loaded my arrow delicately in my bow and pulled back on the bowstring. I took a deep breath, aimed carefully at my target, then closed my eyes and let my arrow fly.

I opened my eyes in time to watch my arrow arch high, then veer to the left and strike a perfect bullseye,...in the wrong target. But, it was a bullseye. That's all that matters.

That's how it felt last week when I put a post on Facebook – my regular Ag Fact Friday post – about night feeding to increase the percentage of calves born during daylight hours. I was actually aiming for a non-farm audience, hoping to enlighten in-town folks about an interesting aspect of agriculture.

Instead of hitting that non-farm target, my carefully aimed arrow landed among cattlemen, goat producers, horsemen, and a few shepherds. It's still a bullseye, but not one I'll ever be able to replicate. As one of my tenants has told me on more than one occasion, "It's better to be lucky than good."

At last count, on Friday morning of last week, that post had reached 475,755 Facebook

viewers and had been shared 3,401 times. I have mostly stopped looking to see where viewers are from, but I noticed Bangladesh and New Zealand, as well as Mexico and Canada, and a whole bunch of states in the United States.

In case you missed it, here is the idea.

Research has shown that feeding cows in the evening, instead of in the morning, will cause a majority of calves to be born during daylight hours. We don't really know why this works, but it has been tested many times by researchers,... and cattlemen swear it really does work.

In a study done at Kansas State University over a five year period, involving 537 births, researchers documented 85.4% of calves born between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. when cows were fed in the evening (between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.).

A larger study, done on 15 farms in Iowa and involving 1331 cows, yielded almost identical results — 85% of cows calving between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. In a study at Oklahoma State University, where cows had access to large round bales of grass hay 24/7, but were feed supplement in the evening, the results weren't quite as good, but they still had 72% of their cows calving during daylight hours.

In case you're wondering about the control groups, one of the studies showed 59% of calves born during the day anyway. Others suggest 50% will calve during the day and 50% at night if cows are fed only in the morning.

We understand this isn't for everyone. Some years, like this one, one of the major challenges in Kansas is just getting cows fed without getting stuck in the mud, so cattlemen feed in the morning while the ground is frozen.

And, if we're being truthful, sometimes those night checks are the absolute best part of a

cattleman's day. Of course, that depends on the temperature, and if there has been an opportunity to catch a nap during the day.

If you're interested in seeing some of the comments from cattlemen around the country, go to our website, www.riley.ksu.edu, then click on the Facebook icon in the lower left corner of the page. Once you've reached our Facebook page, scroll down to the Ag Fact Friday post from February 15, 2019 and you'll find testimonials from cattlemen far and wide.

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 gmclure@ksu.edu.

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