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Care of the newborn calf

Calves that are at risk of being born dead or dying in the first 24 hr period after being pulled include:

- Any calf that requires farmer or vet assistance to be delivered
- Large birth weight calves
- Twins or triplets
- From mothers that have a long labour
- Immature/premature calves
- Calves coming back feet first
- Traumatized during the birthing process i.e. broken legs, swollen face, broken ribs (21% of calves pulled with a jack have broken ribs compared to 0% when delivered by caesarean)
- Those calves that appear yellow at the time of birth (this is called meconium staining and indicates calf stress in the uterus)



A check list to follow when pulling calves to try and reduce the number of deaths includes:

- Remove the membranes from the muzzle of the calf
- Remove mucous and fluid from the mouth by using your fingers to scoop it out
- Sit the calf up on its sternum (Never hang a calf up by its back legs or swing it around)*
- The calf should take a breath within 30 seconds (You can stimulate the calf to breathe by placing your finger or a piece of grass/straw in the nose and rubbing the calf's head and chest with towels)
- Check for broken ribs or limbs
- The calf should lift its head by itself within 5 minutes
- The calf should be able to maintain the sitting position by itself within 15 minutes
- Check for congenital defects i.e. Umbilical hernia, mouth defects
- Dip or spray the umbilical cord with iodine or chlorhexidine with 30 minutes of birth
- The calf should stand within 2 hrs and suckle shortly thereafter

- Correctly id and record the calf and mother
- Ensure adequate colostrum intake (See section below)

* Traditionally after a calf has been born it was hung up its back feet, as it was thought to remove fluid from the calf lungs. Some of the fluid does come from the mouth and lung regions but majority comes from the stomach of the calf, which does not need to be removed. The main concern in hanging the calf up by the back legs is that the calf is unable to take the deep breath that is required to correctly inflate the lungs with air.

