

What to Expect When Your Cow is Expecting

FARM ANIMAL FIELD SERVICES

- Gestation length is 280 days +/- 10 days
- The last week to month before birth
 - » Udder becomes enlarged and full
 - » Vulva may appear swollen
 - » Clear vaginal discharge may be present



FIRST STAGE OF LABOR

- Fetus is moving toward birth canal
- Lasts 2 - 6 hours
- Restlessness
- Standing up and laying down more frequently
- Vocalizing
- Increased urination and defecation
- Tail head is raised
- Isolation from the rest of the herd

SECOND STAGE OF LABOR

- Active Labor
- Lasts 30-60 minutes
- Cow may be standing, laying down, or laying down on her side
- "Water breaks" - may see translucent membranous bag which will then burst and clear to cloudy fluid will be expelled
- Active abdominal press
- Calf presents itself and is birthed
 - » Normal presentation is both front feet extended followed by the head

THIRD STAGE OF LABOR

- Fetal membranes/placenta expelled
- Can last 12 - 24 hours

WHEN TO CALL THE VET

- Any prolapse of the vagina or the rectum - excessive tissue hanging out
- Bleeding from the rectum - can indicate excessive straining
- Discharge that is foul smelling, bright red, green, milky or pus-like
 - » Normal discharge can be red tinged but should not be dark red, thick, chunky, or foul smelling
- In stage 1 of labor - restless for greater than 6 hours prior to any contractions noted
- In stage 2 of labor - more than 30 minutes goes by without any progression
 - » For example, contractions start and you don't see any parts of calf in 30 minutes or see part of calf but no progression of labor within 30 minutes
- See a red and thick membrane or "bag" emerge before the calf does
- Incorrect positioning of calf
 - » Head first with no feet
 - » Feet upside-down
 - » Tail or back end first
 - » Only seeing one foot or seeing three or four feet at once
 - » Seeing front legs and no head
- Parts of the calf that have emerged are swollen to touch
- Cow is down after giving birth and cannot rise
- Uterine prolapse following birth