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Livestock and Natural Resources

Home Remedies

I've been enjoying an online group of farm/ranch women as they struggle through calving season. No matter where they are located, it seems we all have the same sort of challenges. Cows not claiming their calves. Everyone has had weak and cold calves be it weather, neglect, or water. I don't enjoy their struggles; I appreciate their home remedies and ingenuity in solving their problems. There have been pictures of wet slimy calves in mudrooms, bathtubs, pickup, and a VW Passat.

Some of these people are hours away from veterinary care, or it's just plain not available. That would be an impossible situation, in my opinion. It's heart-wrenching to see how hard they have tried to keep a calf alive. During the Polar vortex, many slept out in their pickups to watch the herd as they calved. There have been discussions on genetics, birth defects, selecting cattle for good calving instincts, too big of udders, and the best washing machine!

The next topic I'm sure we will be discussing is Calf Scours. Calf diarrhea, also known as scours, is the second leading cause of death in cow-calf herds after reproductive losses (late abortions, stillbirths, and dystocia). Scours prevention focuses on two key areas, the health of the calf and the cleanliness of the environment. Optimal calf health is achieved through proper care of the cow before calving and insuring adequate intake of colostrum at birth. In some scenarios, vaccination against scours is helpful.

The pathogens that cause neonatal diarrhea are transmitted by fecal-oral contamination, i.e., calves are ingesting the pathogens from manure contamination. One of the easiest routes of transmission is from contaminated mud/manure on the cow's udder that is ingested by the calf when it nurses. In this scenario, the calf can become infected with a scours pathogen before it consumes colostrum. The calf can also get exposed to pathogens immediately after birth as it is lying on the ground gasping for those first breaths of life if there is a lot of manure contamination in the calving area.

The calf scour pathogens are normally present at very low levels in the mature cows. However, as the calving season progresses, the number of pathogens increases exponentially as young calves become exposed, infected, and shed many pathogens. This cycle is particularly evident when cows are calved in a single calving area. Generally, there are no problems with diarrhea early on, but pathogen numbers slowly rise and can then explode to a major disease issue. Calves that are 7 to 14 days older than newborn calves can be a major source of pathogens. Rotational calving areas such as the Sandhills Calving system control calf diarrhea by limiting the buildup of pathogens in the environment where the most susceptible calves are.

One of the online group ladies said her radio station ran a whole morning program on the Sandhills calving system. Now that's rural!

David G. Hallauer
District Extension Agent
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Musk Thistle Season

As a biennial or winter annual species, spring is when we start to see musk thistle plants really start to take off and grow. Because of their growth habit, we often have the best opportunity for control in the fall. If that wasn't possible, or there were potential escapes, spring options are still available.

If a controlled burn has been a part of your management program this spring, you likely didn't control much musk thistle, but the removal of leaf litter can increase the opportunity for good spray coverage following the burn. Areas with musk thistle should be sprayed about 10-14 days post burn.

Musk thistle plants are most easily controlled by herbicides during the seedling and rosette stages of growth, with many common herbicides very effective at this stage. Good coverage is essential, but a number of products with active ingredients, such as 2,4-D, dicamba, picloram, metsulfuron, chlorsulfuron, and aminopyralid can all have good results.

Once plants have begun to bolt, combinations of the above products are likely more effective. Multiple active ingredient products will be needed as the plants begin to grow upward.

Although some herbicides have shown some ability to reduce seed viability, control shouldn't be delayed until bloom. Even with herbicides that have been shown to reduce viability, it is unlikely seed production will be eliminated. Get musk thistle controlled now, while still in the rosette stage for best results.

For additional control information, check out the 2021 KSU Chemical Weed Control Guide available via any of our District Extension Offices or online. Your local County Noxious Weed Director is a great source of information and assistance as well.

Mowing Height – Cool Season Grasses

Mowing is a whole lot more enjoyable when you have a lush, green turf stand, and the health of that stand is often affected by mowing height. As our cool season turf grasses (bluegrass, fescue, etc...) take off and grow right now, make sure you have your mower deck set at an appropriate height to encourage good turf grass health.

For Kentucky bluegrass lawns, keep mowing height at two to three inches. Tall fescue lawns should be mowed at three to three and a half inches. If you want to mow as low as an inch and a half the first mowing, that may help remove some old dead grass and speed green up slightly, but don't do it for much more than a cutting. Keep mowing heights at that three-inch level for the remainder of the season.

If you're tempted to drop mowing height, keep in mind the potential results. Crabgrass seed has to have light to germinate. Higher mowing heights help shade soil to reduce light for germination. Grass root depth and mowing height are also directly related. The higher the height of cut, the deeper the root system. Deeper root systems equal more drought-resistant turf.

Cindy Williams
Meadowlark Extension District
Food, Nutrition, Health, and Safety

Working from Home? Practice These Healthy Habits

As some of us may be continuing to spend more time at home, it can be difficult to adapt to a new routine and adjust to working from home. Whether it's the TV show your child is watching or the urge to snack, you don't have plenty of distractions in your normal workplace.

But working from home presents an excellent opportunity to start practicing healthy habits and find a new routine that will benefit your mental and physical health. Here are some tips from the American Institute for Cancer Research to make the most out of your work from home day.

*Increase your activity—Make a standing desk. Research has shown that sitting for extended periods of time can be damaging to your health. Break up your sitting by standing up while working. Utilize boxes or books to add height to your current desk or a short bookshelf. Elevate a small portable table by stacking books or blocks of wood under each foot. Top a table with a small end table or child-size table to create a standing desk at eye level by anchoring a shelf at standing height.

*Move while you work—While attending meetings, reading emails, listening to conference calls or webinars, using your mobile device, taking a walk outside, getting on the treadmill, or sitting on the floor and stretch major muscle groups. If you can do your work while moving or stretching, take every opportunity to do so.

*Take timed breaks—Make sure you are taking at least 1-2 minute breaks for every hour of sitting. Set the alarm on your computer, phone, or watch to remind you to get up and walk or stretch.

*Engage in daily physical activity. Do 30 minutes of moderate to intense physical activity every day (meaning you are able to talk but not able to sing while exercising). Vary your activities, so you don't get bored—walk, jog, bike the neighborhood or find hiking trails. You can also be engaging livestream group classes from your fitness center or use a smart device to find exercise videos on YouTube.

*Use household items to strength train. If you don't have weights at home, get creative with items around the house. Find a strength training workout online that fits your physical fitness level and lift full water bottles, canned foods, laundry detergent, or pots and pans.

*Set exercise goals. To help you stay accountable and feel like you are working towards something, set an exercise goal in minutes or miles to achieve over the course of a period of time. Make your goal to walk 24 miles by the end of 14 days or get 150 minutes of physical activity a week.

Hydrate, Eat Smart, and Snack Less

*Be intentional about drinking water. It is generally recommended to drink eight cups of water throughout the day. Start first thing in the morning by drinking a cup of water before you brew your tea or coffee. Use a refillable water bottle to monitor your water intake and help keep yourself on track.

*Stick with a routine eating plan. Instead of allowing yourself to grab multiple snacks throughout the day, strive to eat a balanced breakfast, lunch, and dinner with a few healthy snacks in between. Follow MyPlate model (located at MyPlate.gov) when making your meals, and be sure to enjoy them away from your desk. Taking a lunch break at home is still important, and it allows you to mindfully eat without distractions.

*Get the whole family involved. Make planning meals a family affair and teach your children how to read recipes, plan meals and create grocery lists.

*Check your kitchen environment. Place fruit, chopped vegetables, and water cups in view, and move candy dishes, packaged snacks, and sweets out of sight. Keep the refrigerator organized with healthy, plant-based options in the front and higher calorie items tucked in the back.

While working from home presents many new challenges, it also presents new opportunities to improve your health. How have you changed your working environment at home to better your health?

Nancy Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

Immediate Benefits from Physical Activity

The best activity is the one you will actually do, so try some different ones, find what is enjoyable for you, and stick with it. When you think about physical activity, remember that some is better than none, more is better than some, and too much is hard to get.

Focus on how you feel after physical activity. Exercise increases brain chemicals associated with feeling happy, feeling less anxiety and stress, and even less physical pain. Getting more movement can also help some people relieve feelings of depression.

During moderate or vigorous activity, your body and brain produce hormones and neurotransmitters that improve your mood, enhance your memory, increase energy levels and elevate your sense of well-being.

These are the body's "feel-good" chemicals at work. While your muscles will feel tired after activity, you will probably feel more relaxed. You may also feel a sense of accomplishment, which gives you a boost of self-confidence. Feeling better as a result of movement can be a powerful motivator.

Being in nature can also work wonders for your state of mind, and the popularity of outdoor activity has risen dramatically as we cope with pandemic life. Compared to indoor activity, outdoor walking creates even greater improvements in mood, enjoyment, and the intent to exercise in the future. Research shows that exercising outdoors can have a similar effect on the brain and mood as meditation.

Here is a tool if you are ready to explore outdoor trails near where you live or to plan a fun family or friend outing. Visit www.alltrails.com to see trails in your area.