

As we mentioned last week, many producers will soon be busy with their herd calving season. Preparation for such an important time may include anything from feed alterations to moving the cows to a more easily accessible pasture. Though it is important to think about feed and management strategies, it is equally important to think about potential medical problems that may take place in the months surrounding calving season. One medical problem that may occur before or after calving is prolapse.

In spring calving herds, the month of January has the highest incidence of prolapsed cows. This is because the cows are in their last trimester of gestation and are often consuming free choice hay. The large fetus combined with the enlarged rumen increase pressure in the abdominal cavity of the cow, increasing the opportunity for a prolapse to occur. This type of prolapse is known as a vaginal prolapse. Prolapse of the vagina, with or without the cervix, is most common when the pelvic muscles have been stretched repeatedly. This is seen in older cows that have had several calves, and in cows that were once very fat, but have lost a significant amount of weight. A vaginal prolapse is about the size of a volleyball and is smooth in texture. Cervicovaginal prolapses are more elongated and cylindrical than vaginal prolapses and will have mucous and folds.

Uterine prolapses are less common, but more serious than vaginal prolapses. This type of prolapse occurs immediately after or within hours of calving. Some factors that may predispose a cow to have a uterine prolapse include difficulty calving that causes injury to the birth canal, severe straining during labor, or an abundance of pressure applied while pulling the calf. Uterine prolapse, as opposed to the vaginal prolapse, is very large in size and often hangs down to the hocks.

While any type of prolapse should be repaired, the uterine prolapse should be handled as a medical emergency and repaired as soon as possible. Vaginal prolapse should also be considered an emergency if the bladder is caught in the vaginal wall and is prolapsed, as this prevents urination. A prolapsed bladder is also an emergency because it has a high chance of rupturing, which may lead to fatal consequences.

After the prolapse is repaired, management decisions should be made regarding the fate of the cow. Because the likelihood of a vaginal prolapse recurring is high, the cow with a vaginal or cervicovaginal prolapse should be culled. Such drastic measures are not always necessary for cows that have endured a uterine prolapse. Infection of the uterus, which prevents conception, is not uncommon in cows that have had a uterine prolapse. Due to this, if the cow does not breed back after the prolapse repair, she should be culled from the herd. If she successfully breeds back, she may be kept in the herd as a productive cow.

Prolapse of any type should be repaired in a timely manner. To have this done, or for more information regarding prolapsed, please contact us.