

Calving on Grass

Less labor, feed, vet bills



More live calves, less stress with later calving

As ranchers grow tired of the increasing animal loss and human stress caused by calving during colder, wetter March and April weather, winter calving traditions continue to be re-examined in South Dakota. May and June, when calves can be born on green grass in better weather, follows nature's timing for optimum survival of fawns--and is becoming the management tool of choice for more and more ranchers for baby calves.

More thoughts on May calving

- March and early April blizzards are no longer a factor in later calving, so very few facilities are needed.
- Many ranchers who have transitioned from March to May calving begin a culling process of larger framed, heavier milking cows to smaller framed animals.
- With nicer weather and green grass, cows only need to be checked morning and evening, some ranchers say. They have more time for other things, and less stress as more cows birth calves on their own.

For More Information:

The South Dakota Grassland Coalition offers an excellent 25-video series on Alternative Calving Dates featuring South Dakota ranchers who have successfully moved their calving dates into late April, May and June.



Calving on Grass: South Dakota NRCS and SDSU Extension Rangeland Management Specialists and producers experienced with later calving say it improves life for the cow, calf, and rancher, and improves profitability.

What producers say



Pat Guptill, Quinn

"We've cut our input costs to less than half of what it was with earlier calving. Production costs are cut with the need to feed less hay. We don't need a bigger calf, just a live calf."



Bart Carmichael, Faith

"Later calving gives you so many more marketing options. You can sell that calf right off the cow, or background them, or you can take them partially or all the way through green grass and sell them."



Lyle Perman, Lowry

"By moving to later calving, you'll find that your labor requirements and stress levels will go down, your quality of life will go up, and maybe you can stay in the livestock business."

THE BOTTOM LINE

Input costs can drop dramatically with later calving. Cows can graze April pastures to get into condition for May calving, rather than incurring higher costs of feed in a yard. Fewer calves are lost than with colder weather, and those born are healthier with less risk of vet bills.



GROWING RESILIENCE
THROUGH OUR SOILS