## Calving Distribution and Herd Health

## Season 1, Bonus Episode

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**Robin Salverson:** Welcome to a bonus episode of Cattle HQ brought to you by South Dakota State University Extension. Olivia Amundson and myself Robin Salverson were able to catch up with Dr. Bleaux Johnson, Veterinarian with West River Vet Services in Hettinger, ND to get his thoughts on the current conditions in the country. Along with some of the cases they have been seeing at the clinic this spring during calving, plus learn what maybe causing some of these calving issues. Olivia will kick off this episode of Cattle HQ.

**Olivia Amundson:** I am super curious, what is the grass situation out there, what is what are things going to look like this summer. Are guys going to be able to sustain their cattle out there. My family hauls all of our cattle out west for the entire summer from calving to weaning. We are getting real nervous right about now, I mean the cows are going to go out there, but so are alot of truckloads of hay. So I am real curious at where things are at what you're seeing.

**Bleaux Johnson**: It is a challenge, especially on the grazing forage side of things. Because of limited good quality forage put up that we normally harvest, we have been battling a lot of stuff. There is a big diversity of how cows are managed out here. We have the “farmer cows” guys that are diversified into farming and ranching. They seem to have better feed and/or supplements than the rancher that do minimal farming and live and die off of the forage it's available on the grass usually little rougher country.

Unfortunately, in these areas the rain came way too late, a little bit we got last year was late in the fall October November. There has been almost no snow cover for most of our production area, which you know southwest, North Dakota northwest South Dakota areas and because of that we see, extremely overgrazed pastures. If we would have got a bunch of snow, I think we had so much blow off and it probably would not have done what we wanted anyhow. I sympathize because it's it was either that or get rid of the cows so we've managed as best we could. If we don't get some really good spring moisture we're gonna have a difficult time growing grass again. It's going to be stunted it's going to take I don't know how much, maybe four inches of rain in may, to get us going or April, it might be almost double that to really see our production back to what we need, and that might be a stretch to ask for that this year.

Discussions i've had with clients have been, we need to be planning drought management now not when we try to turn out because those pastures got really overgrazed are not going to be producing as much, and they need to be you know allowed to catch up, if we can. That's an easy answer for a vet to say when there are starving cows and no more feed pile left. I am worried going forward as we probably hurt the pastures, a little bit in some areas if we don't get a lot of good early moisture.

**Robin Salverson**: Bleuax, even if we do get that good early moisture. We still have to be very aware of when we send those cows back out on that grassland because we could could cause a big detriment on that growing plant. Because it'll be very, very tempting once we see that green come through that we want to try to start sending our pairs out to out to pasture. It's already stressed and then add an additional stress of putting grazing on to that, we definitely need to be cautious. Be aware of that we have to feed our cows, a little longer this spring before turnout.

Something else to I am very concerned about is water and it's always concern in western South Dakota, Western North Dakota, Eastern Montana and Wyoming. We didn't have any runoff into our dugouts, dams and creeks. What the water was like last fall is basically what it's going to be like this spring and summer when the ice comes off of those of those waters. So just due diligence right away, and be monitoring your water quality. We are hoping to get those cows and those heifers bred up in a timely manner, here in June, July, or when ever your breeding season is and water influences breeding.

It is never too early to start checking. Today I actually got a couple samples in from down in the Butte county area, they are already testing. So put it on your radar right off the bat.

**Bleaux Johnson:** And one of the biggest issues with surface waters is sulfates and is it evaporates it concentrates. What you said, as far as what was out there in the fall it's all of that level, and probably more when we kick them out. What we end up running into is, we are usually moving them from our home area which is almost always a well or some type of pipeline water that is usually really low in sulfates especially compared to our surface water. So even if it's in a marginal status, like let's say 1500 parts per million we've had cows die on 1500 per per million water, because they went from almost zero with the pipeline and turned out to as pasture with a dugout or dams as their only source they even had to drink that which, like I said, if they adapt to it it's absolutely fine.

We may see a little bit of performance issues but usually don't see death, but we had some dying at 1500 parts per million with polio so. It mean, even though he did everything right you tested he did all that sometimes you got to be acclimated you may have to provide some. You know, water out there for a little while so they can slowly integrating into those dams to be utilized or creeks. Even rivers we've seen them and these drivers get really concentrated turn also be over 3000 parts per million on them because there's no flushing effects, so you have to be really cautious of them. And one other thing on the grazing we see this a lot post drought, where we've overgrazed but that read green up the new growth. We see a lot more technique with that so because we don't have that old forge base out there to kind of neutralize that. So when they're eating all green fresh less stress we do see a lot more technique pop up so planning on your hi Meg mean supplements prior to going out there and wall out on the forage will be a big thing I feel coming into this this spring and summer.

**Robin Salverson**: i'm glad you mentioned that when I was at a branding one May, and all this and I got pulled away to go help us some down cows do to grand Canyon was a dry year dry dry dry dry. I mean if you couldn't find anything in town to help to dress and he goes, because it was leaving the shells that fast, even though it was a very dry year and a lot of people do have that misconception that. You know, not much out there don't have to worry, but again it's that it's not green girls now without any old for it to consume with that.

**Bleaux Johnson:** If we get any kind of moisture it's going to green up and look beautiful out there, I mean it's just going to look like a green carpet, but as Nice as it looks it can be kind of that deadly situation, I mean if we haven't supplemented properly.

**Robin Salverson:** To kind of reference back to being dry last year, what have you seen out in the field, or through your veterinary practice. We talked about nutrition and the various quality of hay in the country , varying and quality from corn starch to crp per quality to better quality alfalfa. I also noticed in the country that there's a lot of various alternative see so many use that word that we don't normally see come in, so what have you been seeing in in your clinic.

**Bleaux Johnson:** I hate drought. Everything that you thought was textbook you just throw right out the window, and I mean it's it makes it challenging I sympathize for every producer that has to you know change our normal ways to to manage these these droughts. I just kind of going back to last year because of the drought, a lot of that forage is just our normal you know grass alfalfa hey mix scenarios were minimal, especially on the alfalfa side just I don't have many producers that were able to put up in a quality alfalfa and you know. I guess growing up in the in the ranching family, I guess, I didn't know enough of you know why we had what we had for ages but we always fit our grass hey you know from when we started in probably November feeding up until December January. And as we started getting into our you know final trimester a little more alfalfa was introduced. And, especially as calving started, we really need if we had second cutting started implementing that is counting time and I was just I was for milk production. However, on the vet side of things, you know vitamin A is huge and calcium with our our alfalfa. And it's I feel really overlooked by a lot of producers, and I mean is that kid growing up in it, I overlooked I didn't understand it, I guess. And when we don't have that forage it's it's amazing how much problems just on those two levels that i've run into over the years of battle, different drought scenarios vitamin A is one of those just re occurs over and over, and especially in our ranch here type cows that we kind of talked about before. Where they're not getting a lot of you know, Ford supplementation, we can see it on a more normal basis of being vitamin A deficient, so we see more stillborn more week doing calves poor performance on some of those until that green grass gets going fill those needs for for vitamin A. I guess the bigger challenge that we've had to battle has just been that forge diversity that we've had to go into we're seeing a lot of grain for just being utilized that crp like we mentioned corn stocks were able to use a lot of corn grazing and corn residues which they seem to done really well. I think we manage our protein energy pretty good when you look at the calendar and good body condition for the most part. But we have this worry, are we deficient micronutrient wise, I mean and, unfortunately, a lot of people didn't tailor their mineral supplements or whatever supplementation are doing based around that.

A lot of people have mineral supplementation out there are there it's in blocks or tubs are loose minerals. But most of them haven't been balanced to meet our deficiencies that we're lacking and forage so it's been a concern of mine going into this year with you know. All these different forums, as people are using your bye week guys, you know kosher bales, and I mean all these different things we're not used to feeding. I mean a lot of grains i've talked with different nutrition is that they said they've seen a lot of mycotoxins production, especially in orange. Green forage Hayes which may get challenging because you see a lot of late term abortions.

And something we're running into that I don't know the answer right now we're working on it we're trying to figure it out, but we've had a few different hurdlers and some cows kind of acute deaths i'm going down there down for a couple days before they die, but I don't have the answer yet i'm worried it's a deficiency possibly at toxicity or you know something on the mold mycotoxins side of things so.

Every time we start changing up our normal we start running into these other deals, and we think we have it all figured out we've been feeding it for months and we're fine but different stages of gestation really seem to trigger some of you know, abortion cascades or you have five six stillborn and they kind of work through it, but we don't really find that answer, and I think some of those micronutrients micro talks and things add up into these scenarios.

**Robin Salverson:** I agree with having some of the mycotoxins being high in some of the feed that i've also seen come through this past winter. Too much to even consider wanting to bring home because you'll never be able to be any of it because it's so high. So there's definitely been those challenges, and some of those are unknowns like you said you just don't know what's happening to these cows. But he said it's one thing to lose the calf to being some cats issues but to see the cow that loss at this time of the year is not as normal. I will be very interested to hear what maybe some what is happening as you learn more. Because I don't think it's just concentrated in one county I think it's spread throughout a lot of these dryer areas.

**Bleaux Johnson**: yeah, and I mean, I had a sheep scenario is on some us. As they started, had I mean getting into lambing season, I think it was like the first 12. Use something like that and failure to dilate basically what you'd want to call like a ring situation but that's I mean it wasn't bad that we knew there's something off causing this and. We did do any crops yeah and one of the US basically the lambs are just started writing before she could even fully dilate and as we. Liver analysis, we were mildly low and copper or really elevated molybdenum so then hi molly we feel as tying up the rest of the copper that was available, it was more of a copper deficiency. The producer worked with their nutritionist and they altered the mineral package before we even got our results back so it takes a little bit of time. For trying to do it every good so he didn't keep losing lambs and us along with it. Basically, whatever change, they may before we got the results back was enough to help correct that they started to having normal lambs and it was working out well and that was in North Dakota one be kind of north of heading you're here.

But now I I have had some you know dying cows in South Dakota. I've also had a producer visit with the yesterday. They haven't lost cows or calves except maybe one heifer due difficult Labor and then she died a few days later, so we're not sure if that was linked to it or not. But it sounds like the retaining a lot of fluid in the uterus so it's a new one We have high drop situations that we see every sporadically and within heifers every now and then. This is like over 20% of the heifers are having this is they've been visiting with neighbors and people outside and kind of in their county there's multiple occasions where this is happening, so this is a new one that I feeling is probably more nutritionally related.

Just from you know animal management that we are kind of going through, but I just don't know how to pinpoint what our problem is so we're trying to work hand in hand with nutritionist to figure out some of these problems and see how we can correct it.

**Olivia Amundson:** Well, and where we just briefly talked about this a little bit before we started recording this podcast but high drops is seen a lot more and dairy animals than it is in beef. So the fact that you are seeing it and, in more be hurts is very ironic, especially in a in a drought situation because I would consider our dairy females to have probably some of the top nutrition, you know, there is, and so it almost seems completely backwards. I don't know I just so Robin a nice our first case of high drops just this last December, and it was honestly, the first time i'd ever seen it and quite an interesting disease or whatever it is. Yeah that's it's an interesting concept that you're seeing out there and it's too bad really that this is happening.

So you also made a comment earlier that how'd you say that we need to be preparing for a drought year. But we kind of had a drought year last year, and something that one of our co workers always says is that you know you hope for a good year but you plan for a bad year I guess what are some of your thoughts for guys moving forward. To kind of try and combat some of this.

**Bleaux Johnson:** Tough because some of the damage is one I mean if the moisture don't come you just can't fix that scenario that's out there, so I mean if it doesn't improve moisturizing it might be a culling situations much we hate looking at that. We're looking to you know pass drink outside the area which it's expensive, I mean you're going to have a lot of travel, because. It isn't just a one or two county area, and this is getting into different states to correct this and I know as we get west to here it's worse. In the Montana side of things, it was worse than what we face here so to be able to just fix it is something that is outside of our control, unfortunately. But i'm asked you're in this area, we had a couple big fires that really made it difficult for producer mean on top of everything else, trying to manage that through that. Conversation with clients that you know, fortunately, there was a lot of people that trying to help out there were donating hay and things like that and discussions I had with clients where even though you kind of hate to get you to June. You may need to start planning for out till July because that pasture may not be able to be utilized right away, let it develop let it grow, I mean and we're kind of in that scenario, with some of these pastors right now is. Even though it didn't burn if it's shorter is in bad a situation as being burned, and if we don't get really abundance of moisture to get that coming back right away. We need to manage that differently, and I mean that's probably more Robin might have more information on how to manage that, but I mean. We know that in certain stages and stuff like that, if we're out evaluating our pastures it's going to look green it's going to look nice with a you know, an inch of rain out there, but it might be done growing if we don't get anything more than that. So we really have to manage the scenarios pasture by pasture to get through and water is going to be another really, really big issue. Especially those you know big pastures, where there's not wells and we're relying on surface water. It's a pain in the butt but if we're going to utilize forage we may have be planning on alternative water sources may mean whether its surface pipelines two tanks are hauling water.

You know, working with neighbors or whatever, to be able to provide different than run off their wells or whatever to get through, I mean a grazing season it's going to be a challenge.

**Robin Salverson:** When we definitely don't want to put any more pressure on this grassland or this rangeland. Unless you were able to really manage it well in the last year or two and be able to go out on it, but. If you hurt bad it don't matter if you have all your cows or not, you know what I mean it you've got to manage that grassland. So that you can keep those cows around unless you have a lot of harvested forges and we already know there's not very many much harvest this word is out there. Hay sales that are going on right now I mean there one or two hay sales still here happening in the area in that I wish I had had hay on hand i'm not gonna lie that I could sell. Because I could it would I would do very well on that so harvested forages really aren't is not an opportunity it's not you're paying a pretty penny for it, so we really have to manage that dandy forge that we have and whether that's having to call some females than and wait and hold off. Until we're able to to bring them back or by backer or if we do hold him away, be able to bring them back so.

**Bleaux Johnson:** I think kind of in this, I mean yes olivia like what can we do. I mean, like, I mentioned the moisture out of our control but different things we can start looking into is you know, maybe working or contacting different feedlot operation see if we can dry lots of these cattle. Planning ahead until you know May, June get here and it's like we have no forage we're going to be months behind start looking into that and working with some to allocate lot space or whatever, if need be. And a lot here, we see in crp going away, but there are grazing opportunities and droughts with crp. So I mean knowing some of those producers, working with them having that time in your back pocket whether it's for hey forage or grazing opportunity, you know we may have put up fencing mapped all water trying to figure out are these scenarios worth getting into to manage that heard for the year too.

**Olivia Amundson:** Yeah and I think you gotta consider costs to is it going to be economically feasible to do something like that and, and I do know like South Dakota has their grazing exchange I don't know if that has on their you know i've guys can dry a lot cows on it or not, do you know Robin.

**Robin Salverson:** I believe it's more just grazing.

**Olivia Amundson:** Just grazing yeah so I mean if one side of the State gets ring and that might be an option, but if if the East side doesn't then. But I know that you know that could potentially be an option for guys to, but I do know that it's it cost a pretty penny to drive our cars, too, so definitely something to look into, though.

**Robin Salverson:** And something that I really throw caution out there, if you are, and I, I do believe everything that Bleaux and Olivia said about you know finding partners or people that you can maybe can feed feed your replacement heifers and get them bread there at that feedlot and keep them there at that feedlot. One group of animals, you don't have to deal with right but make sure you're going to a reputable place. People can put ads in the papers are desperate I need somewhere my heifers need to go, they need to get off my place they don't have the feed i'm just going to take that person up on their offer. I was visiting someone last summer that went through this situation where they went to visit that feedlot or that farm turned out that it was not the best situation. So I really encourage you to research that facility research at the individual visit those places visit you know, through the feeding periods that they're there visit. Just so that you know those animals are taken care of the way you want them to be taken care of so there's really great opportunities that are but just be aware, so.

**Bleaux Johnson:** I would agree with that, I mean we've had some people that have tried to you know maintain herds by going out of State to feed yard is done Nebraska different things and i've had some I said they've do it again, it was very beneficial had some it almost wrecked them, it was really, really devastating so yeah.

**Robin Salverson:** Thank you Bleaux for joining us for this, a part of a cattle HQ to and talking about drought management and some of the things that you have been seeing within your veterinary clinic and we very much appreciate your insight your thoughts and all your knowledge and thank you olivia to for for joining us on this episode today.

**Bleaux Johnson:** Thank you for having me.

**Robin Salverson:** you're welcome.

**Olivia Amundson:** Thanks Bleuax.

**[Music]**