

# Feed impacts on calving,

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Mother animals are just like athletes. They need the right nutrients at the right time to perform at their best.

Feed considerations for mother and baby livestock animals during lambing, calving, or kidding is crucial. The methods used to feed adult livestock can have major impacts for not only the animals but also for a livestock manager's practices and profitability.

Feeding factors refers to the type of feed or forage an animal is consuming and how that feed or forage is provided to livestock. Not surprising, feeding factors cross species lines and have similar implications for cattle, sheep, and goats. Let's discuss the factors of timing, fetal programming, energy needs, and system relaxation.

## Timing

What time of day animals are fed can impact the potential for birth at night or mostly in the daylight. Daylight deliveries tend to be warmer, less stress on animals and livestock managers, and a whole lot easier to monitor.

A number of research projects from South Dakota State and Iowa State suggest animals fed at 4 p.m. for at least two weeks before delivery had 82–85 percent of young between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. Feeding in the evening keeps pressure in the rumen and stomach higher at night, slowing delivery until feed is processed. This is referred to as the “Konefal Method.”

## Fetal programming

Extensive research on meeting dietary needs by the University of

Nebraska-Lincoln demonstrates that slowly increasing the nutrients fed to a mother animal, gives the newborn the ability to use feed more effectively resulting in increased gain for the same amount of feed as other young.

From personal experience with our operation, pouring a little extra feed to expectant mothers resulted in a 10 percent weaning bonus on calves and lambs. Research refers to “fetal programming,” which describes when young animals are conditioned to gain weight better. The practice hinges around good nutrition and body scoring your herd or flock several times throughout the year.

## Energy needs

Energy is crucial when a mother animal is getting ready to give birth. Adequate energy from food allows an animal to overcome problems and



# lambing, and kidding



move when needed. She can also combat cold and predation better with proper nutrition and energy. It is especially needed in the delivery process. A lack of energy can cause exertion and prevent the delivery process. Evaluate your livestock diet and consider increasing the energy of the diet by at least 20 percent for two weeks before calving, kidding, or lambing.

## System relaxation

High energy in the diet can help in the passage rate of food. This is sometimes known as flushing. Flushing can aid expecting mothers by providing regularity to the digestive tract and more internal room for system relaxation. Providing high energy/high passage rate feed can ease the delivery process if provided 48–96 hours before arrival. There

are many sources of high energy and high passage feeds available. Providing a bran supplement in the last days is one of the more traditional approaches.

Difficulty in delivering baby calves, lambs, and kids is referred to as “dystocia.” Healthy, well-fed animals that are relaxed internally can help avoid the 3–10 percent of difficulty seen in cattle and the 2 percent difficulty in sheep and goats. A number of other factors like having the right mates for young mothers and good monitoring can also help.

## Prescription for time management

Animals with a full stomach usually do not go into labor. Feeding right before leaving for work usually makes pregnant animals wait until the off-farm job person is back home to deal with delivery. Some livestock

producers who work off-farm are finding well-timed feeding adds to a prescriptive artificial insemination of young females, and leads to most of those animals calving, lambing, or kidding in daylight on weekends.

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