**POINTS ON CALVING**

In the last two weeks of pregnancy the vulva swells and the ligaments either side of the tail relax.12-24 hours before calving the cow will separate herself from the herd and this is the best indicator that birthing is near. Udder development is a less reliable indicator as heifer’s udders develop from 4 months on, cows usually in the last 2-3 weeks and sometimes not at all before calving.

Labour process

**Stage 1:** the cow becomes restless, gets up and down, starts contracting her flanks. The first water bag breaks and water is released Do not disturb her at this stage. This can take up to 4 hours in a cow and 8 hours in a heifer.

**Stage2**: the second water bag appears (thin and white) and breaks releasing more fluid, usually a part of the calf is seen. (The cow mostly stays down at this stage until calf is born)

**Stage 3**: the after birth is passed within the next 12 hours.

**When a cow needs help**

* If nothing has happened within 4 hrs in a cow and 8 hrs in a heifer after stage 1 of labour.
* If the water bag breaks and the calf is not born within 2 hrs
* If the cow has separated from the herd, is holding her tail in the air and has not calved in 24 hrs.

**BREECH BIRTHS-**these cows show very little sign of stage one of labour as they do not have the pointed front feet and head of the calf to dilate the cervix. Contractions are very weak and cows can walk around for days trying to calve.

**UTERINE INERTIA**-90% of the force that expels the calf is due to the contraction of the muscle in the uterus (breeding bag), due to nutritional effects seen in August and September the uterine muscles in cattle contracts very weakly. You have to be very observant to notice these cows need help.

**CAESARIAN OPERATIONS**-these can only be done while calf is still alive so do not wait until calf dies to call a vet.

 