

Monitoring Dystocia

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“You can’t evaluate what you don’t measure”.

It’s an old cliché, but it’s true. Dystocia, calving difficulty, or calving ease, whichever name you choose, is a management factor that, according to The Miner Institute’s Heather Dann, only 38% of dairy farms report measuring. Dann also reports that 60% of dairies acknowledge dystocia issues on their farms. Obviously, there is a lot of opportunity here to capture a great deal of important data.

Of those dairies using a calving ease scoring system (CE score), it is logical to wonder how seriously many producers take the information. Many dairies that use CE scores:

- Report CE scores inconsistently, or intermittently
- Don’t have a standardized list of criteria for each score; rely on “judgment calls”
- Don’t record the witness to the calving
- Don’t record details of difficult calvings

Standardized scoring- Definitions of CE scores need not be complicated to be accurate. In fact, simple definitions are better for training purposes.

CE Score	Definition
1	No assistance required or given
2	Assistance provided, though perhaps not necessary, very little effort exerted
3	Assistance necessary, moderate effort, accomplished with one person
4	Assistance necessary, considerable effort, required two people and/or calving aid (e.g. calf jack)
5	Veterinary assistance required, extreme effort, or required surgical procedure

Complete calving report- Aside from the date, time and calf gender information, the person or persons involved with the calving should be recorded, as well as colostrum administration (time, source, and amount), post-parturient treatments, and pertinent calving details.

These would include:

- Head or leg back
- Uterine torsion
- Calf was backwards (breech)
- Calf was upside down
- Calf was huge
- Calf was dead, bloated, dry, etc.
- Cow was lame, lethargic, or otherwise stressed

The more progressive dairies in this area require that those responsible for checking close-up cows record the progress of the cow throughout the calving along with the time of each check. Workers also record the time when a cow is moved from the close-up pen to the calving pen. He uses this information along with the calving reports to provide accurate feedback to the appropriate employees, particularly in cases of early or late calving intervention.

Utilizing the information-

- **Herd managers** can use the information in employee training or calving procedure evaluations. For example, if the night crew is reporting a high percentage of CE scores >2, it could be inferred that perhaps calving intervention is occurring too soon.
- **Veterinarians and herdspersons** can refer to the calving report when making decisions on individual cows
- **Nutritionists-** CE scores compliment BCS information, as well as in conjunction with other periparturient events, such as lethargic or hypocalcemic cows at calving.
- **Bull studs** rely on accurate reporting of calving information for sire evaluations.

Summary- All of this information can be recorded very quickly, and if all those responsible for the calving pens report the information accurately and consistently, it can be invaluable when tweaking feed rations, calving procedures, and training or re-training employees.