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## **No Pinocchio Stories Here!**

I recently saw a video on Facebook, of the poor little dairy calf being taken away from its mother. Those responding were horrified. Of course, PETA was probably behind all of this, the workers were extremely rough with the baby calf, almost throwing it. There is no Pinocchio story here, yes, baby calves are taken away from their mothers. Yes, the cows are milked for human consumption. Dairy calves, for their own good, are taken away from their mothers. By removing them, the dairyman can harvest the colostrum and give to the calf in the right amount. If left with their mothers they will consume too much milk and will get diarrhea and can become sick. We spend a lot of time in the beef industry choosing cows with good maternal instinct. That is not true in the dairy industry. Dairy cows are selected for superior milking ability, and thus, some of them are lousy mothers. Some of them will step on the calf or even charge it.

Three key management concepts can help commercial cow calf operations improve the productivity of their cow herds. The key areas to consider are: bull power, immunize heifers and breed heifers ahead of the cows.

**Bull Power-** Do you have enough bulls to meet the needs of the cow herd? Young bulls 12-15 months old, can service 18-24 females. More mature bulls should be able to breed 25 females or even more if in a small pasture. If you purchase a new bull, they should be brought to your place at least a month before breeding. This gives them time to adapt a new environment. If you are needing a new bull, there are plenty of opportunities to buy some. One of the opportunities is the Legacy Bull Sale at KSU on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, following Cattlemen's Day.

**Immunize the heifers-** Vaccinate for respiratory diseases such as IBR and BVD. Use a modified live vaccine for longer lasting protection. Vaccinations should be given at least a month before breeding. Your veterinarian can recommend other reproductive disease protection vaccines. **Breed the heifers ahead of the mature cows-** breed young heifers about a month before mature cows. This is important for two reasons. Two-year old first calf heifers normally take longer to return to heat cycles after calving than do older cows. Therefore, if they calve early, then when they rebreed, they are in synchrony with the rest of the cows. This can also allow you to watch the heifers more closely early in the calving season. They are the most likely to need assistance.

As you're planning for next year, another thought would be to plan your calving season to coincide with the weather. Are you matching peak green grass with peak lactation? If you are considering changing your calving dates, remember this will effect weaning weights. Be sure to consider all aspects.