



Calf Alive

Assessing practical interventions to reduce calf wastage and herd mortality in northern systems

Our hypothesis is that better nutrition during pregnancy will improve milk delivery, calf health and survival

Mortalities of cows and calves during hot dry seasons are a significant problem for north Australian beef businesses. Poor nutrition and environmental stress during pregnancy calving have been identified as the principal causes. This project aims to assess the impact of methods with good potential to overcome the effects of poor nutrition and weather extremes.

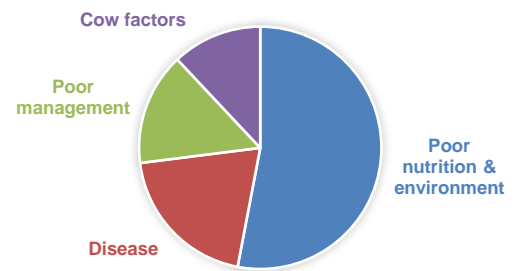
Alternate management selected by beef producers and scientists will be tested on 10 northern beef properties. Weather stations will be established, and remote sensing will be used to monitor animal responses to weather extremes.

Out of this research it is expected that sound principles as part of better management will be available for application across a wide range of situations to improve the welfare and productivity of the animals.

The partnership approach with cattle producers, feed and AgTech companies, government, and natural resource management organisations, will facilitate the rapid adoption of proven strategies.

The expected impact from this project is 5% more calves and 1% more cows being alive at weaning each year across businesses where new systems are implemented.

Overall comparative impact of main contributors to calf wastage in north Australia



McGowan et al (2014); McGowan et al (2017)





Objectives

- Test the cost-effectiveness of nutritional strategies to increase calf survival, reduce herd mortality, and improve calf growth
- Monitor environmental stress and the effects on breeding cows
- Determine if cows that use protein more efficiently during dry seasons can be identified using tail hair tests
- Determine the incidence of mortality in calving 2-year-olds heifers
- Calculate the impact of alternate management to reduce calf mortality on business productivity, profitability and sustainability



This research is funded/ we partner with Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and CQUniversity Australia.

Participation benefits

The success of Calf Alive depends on the active participation of producers interested in improving its business and reducing calf wastage in north Australia. There are several benefits in participating:

- Be an active member in an exciting research project
- Clear understanding of performance, productivity and profitability
- Improve production using evidence from project testing
- Gain invaluable information for genetic improvement of the herd
- Inputs such as supplements or minor infrastructure

Benefit to industry

The current rate of calf wastage is not sustainable and threatens the core of the beef cattle industry in our region. Calf Alive will deliver the following benefits:

- Network of producers testing the real-life applicability of interventions to reduce calf wastage
- Calculation of the production and financial implications of alternate nutrition and management
- Ready-to-use evidence-based recommendations to consistently increase calf survival rates
- Practical test to identify efficient cows
- 11,700 tonnes of additional annual liveweight sales by 2031