

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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“Nutrition and Stress in Utero Impact Animals for a Lifetime”

“There really isn’t a whole lot of difference between having a baby, and helping calve out first calf heifers”. That is what my well-meaning husband told my doctor as we prepared to welcome our first baby into the world last year.

While in the moment I was not thrilled with my husband’s analogy, he’s also not wrong!

During pregnancy, regular checkups are key for mother and baby to maintain good health. The same is true for beef cattle. In the case of replacement heifers, research has shown that if their diet was restricted when they were in utero, there can be some long-term negative implications for them as they become cows, according to Phillip Lancaster beef cattle nutritionist with the K-State Beef Cattle Institute.

Fetal programming relates to how we feed and manage the cow during pregnancy and its impact on the calf’s performance at birth and throughout its lifetime. In extreme caloric restrictions that are the result of drought or mismanagement there is likely a negative impact on the pregnancy. In early gestation, malnourishment can impact the development of the gastrointestinal track and liver. Later in the pregnancy, it can impact muscle, ribeye size and marbling.

Making sure your nutrition program has accurate amounts of protein, energy, vitamins and minerals are crucial to maintaining body condition score. Cows who maintain a good body condition throughout the pregnancy are more likely to have a healthy calf.

If you haven’t checked your forage for protein or energy analysis yet this year contact the Extension office for assistance. The Extension office also has the capabilities to help balance your complete ration including forage, protein sources, etc.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Lindsay Shorter, at lindsayshorter@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.