

Causes & Treatment of Retained Placenta

Prepared by Dr. John van Leeuwen, Dr. Olivia Harvey and Dr. Ayub Kaniaru



Definition of Retained Placenta:

A retained placenta is only a problem when it is still there for more than 24 hours after calving.

Effects of Retained Placenta:

- 1) Some cows that develop a retained placenta can go on to develop an infection in the uterus that can cause a fever in the cow, reduced feed intake, and reduced milk production.
- 2) Some cows with a retained placenta and uterus infection will have difficulty conceiving when they are bred.

Four Main Causes of Retained Afterbirth:

- 1) Calving more than 1 week before due date – therefore placenta is not “mature”
- 2) Twins – because they usually calve early, leading to an immature placenta
- 3) Vitamin E & Selenium Deficiency – because the attachment between the uterus and placenta is not properly formed, making it “immature” and “stronger” than normal
- 4) Difficulty with Calving – because the uterus does not contract quickly afterwards

Treatment:

Only some cows with retained placenta need treatment. While the cow has a retained placenta, the cow should be closely monitored for appetite and milk production. If the milk production or appetite become worse, you should call for prompt veterinary assistance to treat the cow with medicine.

A cow that is treated promptly after retained placenta will usually produce a normal amount of milk, however delayed treatment could reduce milk production long-term.

1. Do not remove or have a vet tech remove the placenta until it pulls out easily. This usually takes seven to ten days after calving.
2. Cut off the portion of the afterbirth which is outside the cow to prevent dogs chewing the placenta and vulva.
3. If a cow with a retained placenta has reduced appetite and an above normal temperature, treat the cow with an antibiotic, such as penicillin or ceftiofur, administered intramuscular. Remember to abide by appropriate milk withdrawal times before selling her milk again. A high temperature can be treated with an anti-inflammatory, such as flunixin or aspirin.
4. Do not put anything into the cow's uterus, except perhaps tetracycline pills, and only if the cow is being treated with penicillin.

How to prevent retained placenta:

- 1) To prevent calving more than 1 week before due date, ensure that you are feeding the cow properly, including an increasing amount of grain starting at 4 weeks before calving. Also, reduce stress in the environment during the month prior to the calving date. This includes avoiding such things as large changes in temperature (eg. shade no longer provided), large changes in types of feed, additions to the herd, and illness.
- 2) There is nothing you can do to prevent twins. Certain families of cows are more likely to have twins than others.
- 3) To prevent vitamin E & selenium deficiency, it is important to provide adequate mineral during the dry period. It's recommended to feed 150 to 200 grams per day of a mineral supplement containing vitamin E and Selenium for the two weeks prior to calving. The cow could also receive an injection of vitamin E and selenium 10 days prior to calving as prevention. Adequate nutrition will not only prevent nutritionally related retained placentas, it will also increase milk production and encourage the cow to return to estrus sooner for successful rebreeding.
- 4) To prevent difficulties with calving, breed using a trait called calving ease. Cows with narrow hips and heifers are more likely to have calving difficulties. Breeding these animals using bulls that have good calving ease will decrease calving difficulties.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact the following WSHGD animal health personnel:

Dr. Ayub Kaniaru 0722565628
Patrick Gatheru 0721215123
John Nyaga 0721270478

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