

# Surprise! Cow has two calves in two different weeks

*No. 93 delivers second calf five days after the first*



**Kerri Sandaine/Lewiston Tribune**

ANATONE - Larry and Terry Reeves have seen twin calves born on their Onstot Road ranch, but this winter they got a surprise.

One of their cows, No. 93 to be specific, gave birth to a second calf - five days after the first one was born. Having twins arrive almost a week apart is quite uncommon, they said.

"We've never had this situation before," said Larry, a lifelong cattle rancher. "It's pretty rare."

On Jan. 22, a small, red bull weighing about 55 pounds was born to No. 93. The second calf, a normal-sized 85-pound red heifer, was born Jan. 27.

"I thought it was crazy," Terry said, recalling the strange event. "I was going out every day, checking on the cattle. She had her first one and we doctored it and everything. I came out a few days later, and the placenta was hanging out of her, and there was the second one. I was just happy it was alive and doing well."

David Rustebakke, a longtime Clarkston veterinarian, said regular twins occur in about 1 percent to 4 percent of cattle births, depending on the breed. In some breeds, the percentage is even less than 1 percent, he said.

But having the births occur separately on different days is even more unusual.

"I can remember seeing it three or four times in my career," said Rustebakke, who has been a vet for 40 years.

In the case of the twins born at the Reeves ranch, Rustebakke can only speculate what occurred. It's possible the cow's uterus was tired after the first birth, so only one calf was born. The placenta didn't detach, so the second calf, which was in a separate sack, did not lose its nutritional support.

Cows can handle twins well, much better than horses, he said. When mixed-sex twins are born to cattle, the heifers are sterile 90 to 95 percent of the time and known as free-martins.

The Reeves have 40 head of cattle, predominantly cross-bred Black Angus. This year's calving season was busy, with 37 calves born in 36 days.

Terry said she watched No. 93 closely to see how the cow would handle her twins.

"She fed one and then she went down to the other one and bawled at it. The calf jumped right up and started eating," she said.

The new calves will be sold next September or October, except for five or six, which will be kept at the ranch as replacement heifers.

"We've raised all of these cattle," Terry said amid a sea of red and black faces eating hay in a pasture near their house.

The Reeves, both 63, have been in the cattle business together since they were married 38 years ago. Like many ranchers, they agree the market is hot this year, with cattle fetching some of the best prices anyone can remember.

"It's awesome," Terry said. "I love it. I never thought I'd see the day we'd sell a steer for \$1,300 in the fall, but we did. I can remember years ago when a 700-pound steer went for \$350."

The Reeves keep some of their cattle in a feedlot to eat, several are sold as club calves for the Asotin County Fair and the rest are auctioned off at the Lewiston Livestock Market.

Breeding takes place during the second week of April and the first calf this year was born Jan. 20. Terry keeps track of all of the births, recording the date, temperature, weight and other statistics. This year, the temperatures ranged from 0 to 35 degrees on the days when calves were born, she said.

Larry, who also works full-time as a management program analyst for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, said they haven't had any death losses this year, so they're actually one calf ahead, thanks to No. 93.

"She's a good enough milker that we've left both of the calves on her," Larry said.

The twin calves scampered in opposite directions when visitors arrived Wednesday afternoon, but No. 93 didn't stray too far from the feeder.

"She likes to eat," Terry said, "and so do her calves."

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