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# RESEARCH FACTS

RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT FOR THE CANADIAN BEEF INDUSTRY

IN PROGRESS

## Tools for Veterinarians and Producers to Enhance Prevention of Calf Death and Disease

Project Title:

Early Calf Health and Survival Management Risk Assessment Tool

Researchers:

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Project  
Code:

KTT.01.18

Completed:

*In Progress.  
Results  
expected in  
July 2021.*

### Background

Disease control strategies are the core of health management of beef herds. Preventive health management can reduce antimicrobial use, improve animal performance and welfare, and ideally, optimize producer profitability.

Implementation and effectiveness of health management practices are dependent on producers' knowledge of and commitment to the disease control strategies involved. Producers report they are unlikely to comply with recommendations if they do not see the value for their operation. Furthermore, there is a lack of accessible information about available products and recommended practices that are most effective. Veterinarians may lack information about recommended practices or not relay this information to their clients effectively. Producers who do not have a relationship with a veterinarian are even more likely to struggle to access and implement effective animal care and health management strategies.

Operations that experience exceptionally high calf morbidity and mortality rates, largely attributable to atypical environmental factors, express that they were unaware of their management vulnerabilities. They also report that they could not access the help they wanted from their veterinarians. In such cases, veterinarians may have been too busy or required additional information in order to provide consultative-level services to beef producers, particularly in mixed veterinary practices. Providing tools to both veterinarians and producers to give them easy access to pertinent information and facilitate discussions about effective management practices for individual operations would help improve cattle health, welfare, and productivity.

### Objectives

- 1) To assess and compile recommended management practices to prevent calfhood disease and mortality into accessible

resources for veterinarians and producers; and,

2) To develop a risk assessment tool for calfhood disease and mortality to act as a framework for discussions between producers and veterinarians to customize an implementation plan for best management practices.

### ***What they will do***

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A group of experts (progressive producers, veterinarians, researchers) will be surveyed and participate in focus groups to determine the most important recommended best management practices for calf health and survival. A systematic review of the literature on recommended best management practices will also be conducted. The information will be compiled into easily accessible resources for producers and veterinarians.

The results will then be used to develop an early calfhood disease and mortality risk assessment tool. This tool, structured as a checklist, will include questions about disease control strategies to help producers and their veterinarians assess where opportunities exist to improve health management on that particular operation. The checklist will be piloted on 10-15 cow-calf operations who maintain treatment and mortality records and modified as needed before finalizing and distributing to industry.

### ***Implications***

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The checklist and other resources developed will encourage cow-calf producers and veterinarians to work together to develop tailored disease control strategies for individual operations and increase the adoption of management practices that effectively prevent calfhood death and disease. This will improve resilience within cow-calf operations, even among apparently well-managed herds.

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