

## Winter calving is hard on cattle.

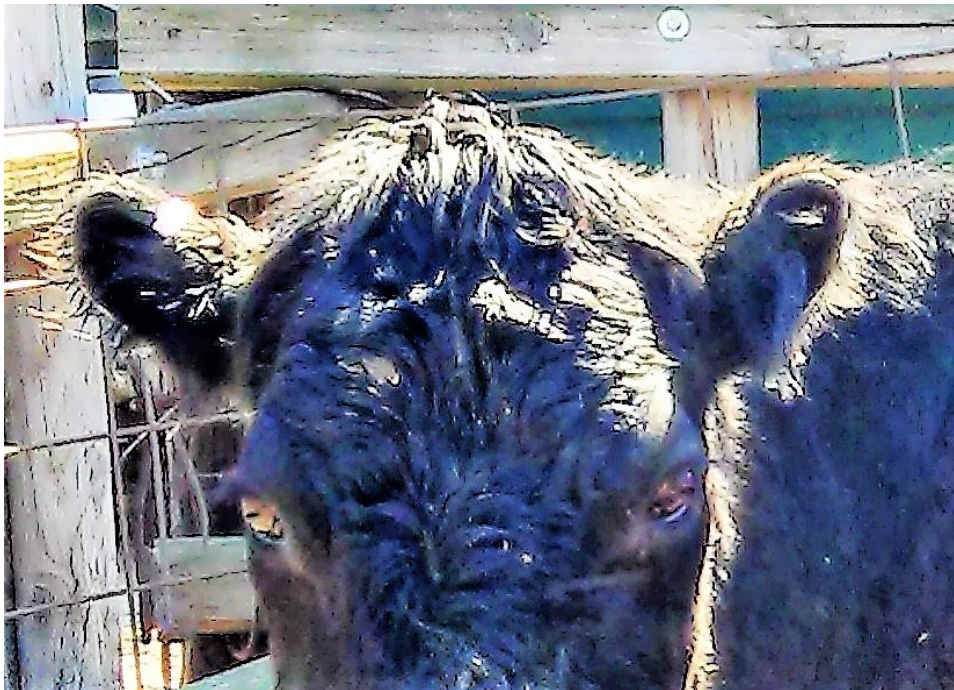
The heifers in the two photos suffered from excessive cold, probably in the first hours of their lives. The extremities of their ears were frozen. Notice that their ears are small and the outer edges are hairless. This can happen to beef calves that are born “out of season” in winter weather.

Normally, animals give birth in the spring or early summer. The reasons for that are obvious. Some farmers breed their cattle to calve in winter. They do so in order to hit a better market window. I consider this a bad practice.

Occasionally a heifer is bred out of season accidentally. Well, it is an accident as far as the farmer or rancher is concerned.

Dairy animals are normally housed in a barn. Beef animals are not. This article is about beef animals. I buy 100 beef calves each year. In searching for the right animals, I see thousands of cattle. Occasionally I see animals affected by excess cold like the two in the photos.

When calves suffer tissue freezing the damage follows a known sequence.



First the ears freeze. That can range from slight damage as with the two shown here to complete loss of the outer ear. In general, ear loss does not have a significant effect on the calf's health or growth. I will sometimes buy these animals. They normally sell at a discount but will do well in my pastures. Their growth rate, health and meat quality are normal.

Next the tails may freeze. Typically, animals with frozen tails will have a stump tail that is about a foot long. I seldom buy these animals. Without an effective tail, cattle are unable to defend themselves from flies and other insects.

The third step in frost injury is lameness of the back feet.

Cattle and calves normally tuck their front legs under them when they lie down. That protects the front legs and feet.



Their back legs are exposed, however. The back legs are folded along but not under the body. The injury that commonly occurs is damage to the hooves or tendons. Calves with this injury have a clumsy slew-footed gait. Feedlot finishers never buy these animals because they do not hold up in stressful conditions. I seldom buy these calves either, even though they sometimes have a good tail. Being a poor walker limits the animal's ability to do well on pasture.

Animals with injuries worse than frozen back feet do not exist. Damage beyond that is fatal.

I avoid calf births later than September.

Even if they do well at birth, winter is hard on calves born late in the year.

The two heifers in the photos had a good grazing season and finished in excellent health.

Best regards. Tom