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FURst Aid: Calving difficulties — recognizing them, intervening and when to call the vet

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OUTLINE

- What is a dystocia?
- How common is it?
- What are the negative consequences of it?
- What does a normal calving look like?
- When should I intervene?
- How to investigate what might be wrong
- How to assist a calving
- When to call the vet

QUIZ TIME!



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**HOW MANY COWS DO
YOU OWN?**

**HAVE YOU EVER
ASSISTED A CALVING
BEFORE?**

What is a dystocia?

A prolonged or difficult birth that may or may not be assisted

- Not all assisted calvings are dystocias
 - (e.g. backwards calf)
- Not all unassisted calvings are normal births
 - (prolonged, stillbirth)

Calving Difficulty

of calvings
are assisted **5%**

Calving Difficulty

13.5% in heifers

3.2% in cows

Calving Difficulty

96%

of beef producers assist >1 calving per season

WHY DO WE CARE?

Assisted calves born
injured, oxygen
deprived, or both

Higher risk of failed
transfer of passive
immunity, morbidity,
and mortality

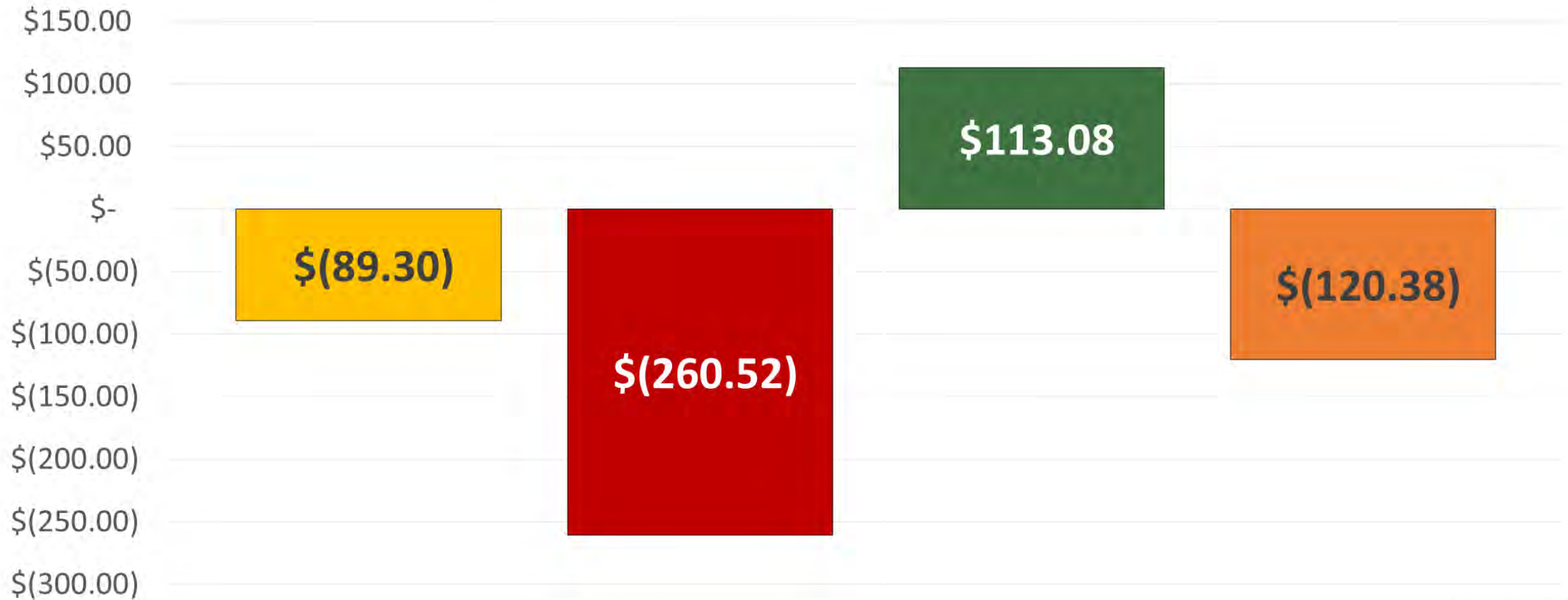
WHY DO WE CARE?

Assisted cows have a higher risk of retained fetal membranes and metritis

Uterine diseases lead to an increased risk of infertility and early culling from the herd

Cost of Assisted Calvings

■ Unassisted HEIFERS ■ Assisted HEIFERS ■ Unassisted COWS ■ Assisted COWS



WHAT IS NORMAL?



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Stages of Calving

1

Stage 1 –
relaxation and
dilation of the
cervix and “water
breaking”

8-12 hours

2

Stage 2 – passing
of the fetus
through the birth
canal

1-4 hours

3

Stage 3 – passing
of the placenta

12-24 hours



WHEN SHOULD I INTERVENE?



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Average Length of Parturition



65 min



J. Dairy Sci. 94:5494–5501
doi:10.3168/jds.2011-4436
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Assessment of calving progress and reference times for obstetric intervention during dystocia in Holstein dairy cows

G. M. Schuenemann,¹ I. Nieto, S. Bas, K. N. Galvão,² and J. Workman
Department of Veterinary Preventive Medicine, The Ohio State University, Columbus 43210

Too Soon to Intervene?



Early assistance did not negatively influence calf stillbirth risk, vigor, or transfer of passive immunity

When to Intervene

Not making progress every 30-60 minutes

Abnormal presentation/position/posture

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG



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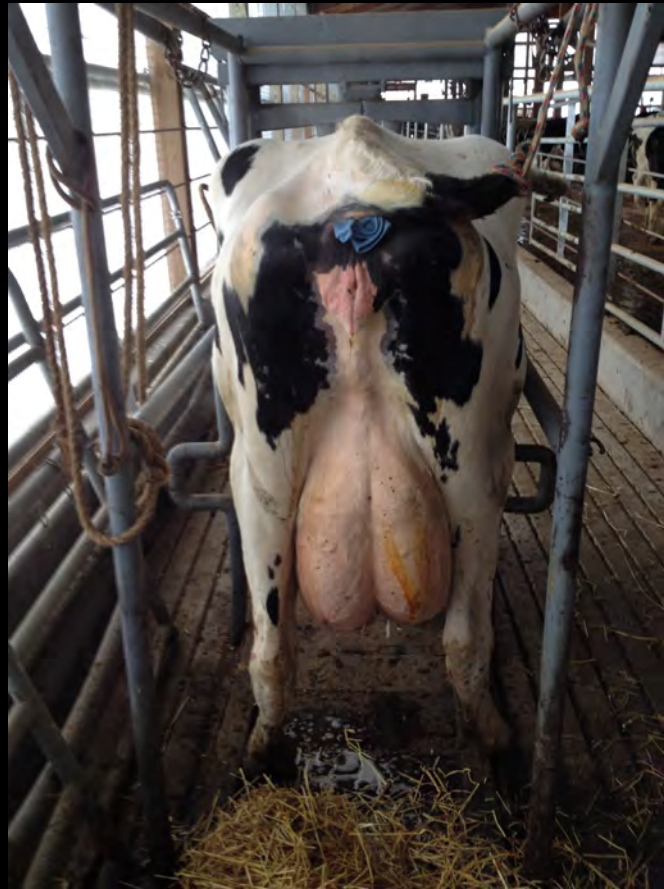
Equipment

- Bucket of warm water
- Disinfectant
- Lubricant (not J-lube!!)
- OB sleeves
- OB chains, handles, head snare, calf jack
- Halter/ropes



Restraint

- Restrain animal
- Tie tail
- Clean perineum
- Vaginal examination with OB sleeves and lube



Golden Rules of Calving

Be Clean

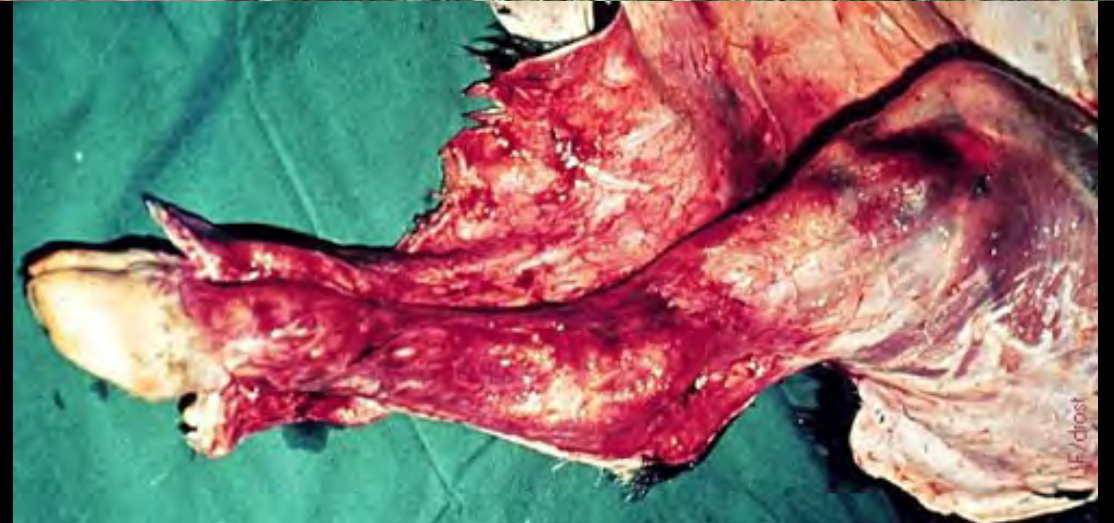
Be Gentle

Use Lots of Lube

TRAUMA



UF/drost



UF/drost

CALVING ASSISTANCE



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Vaginal Examination

Enter the
vagina:

Identify the
cervix (note if
fully dilated,
obstruction,
etc.

Enter the
uterus

Identify the
calf:

Identify the
“3 Ps” and
the “Rule of
3”

Utrecht Method for Dilating Vagina



**Check for
Dilation of the
Cervix**



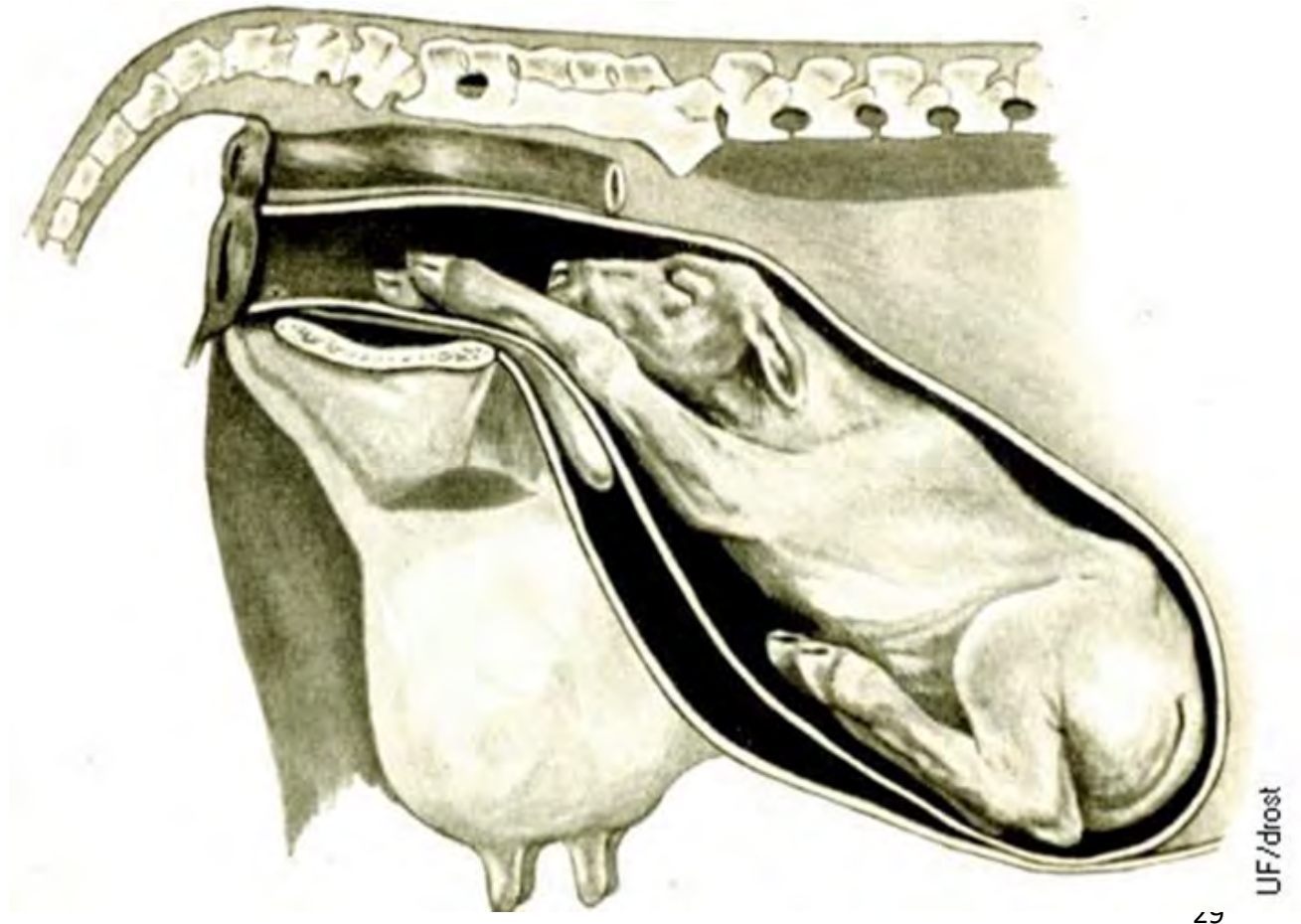
THE 3 Ps



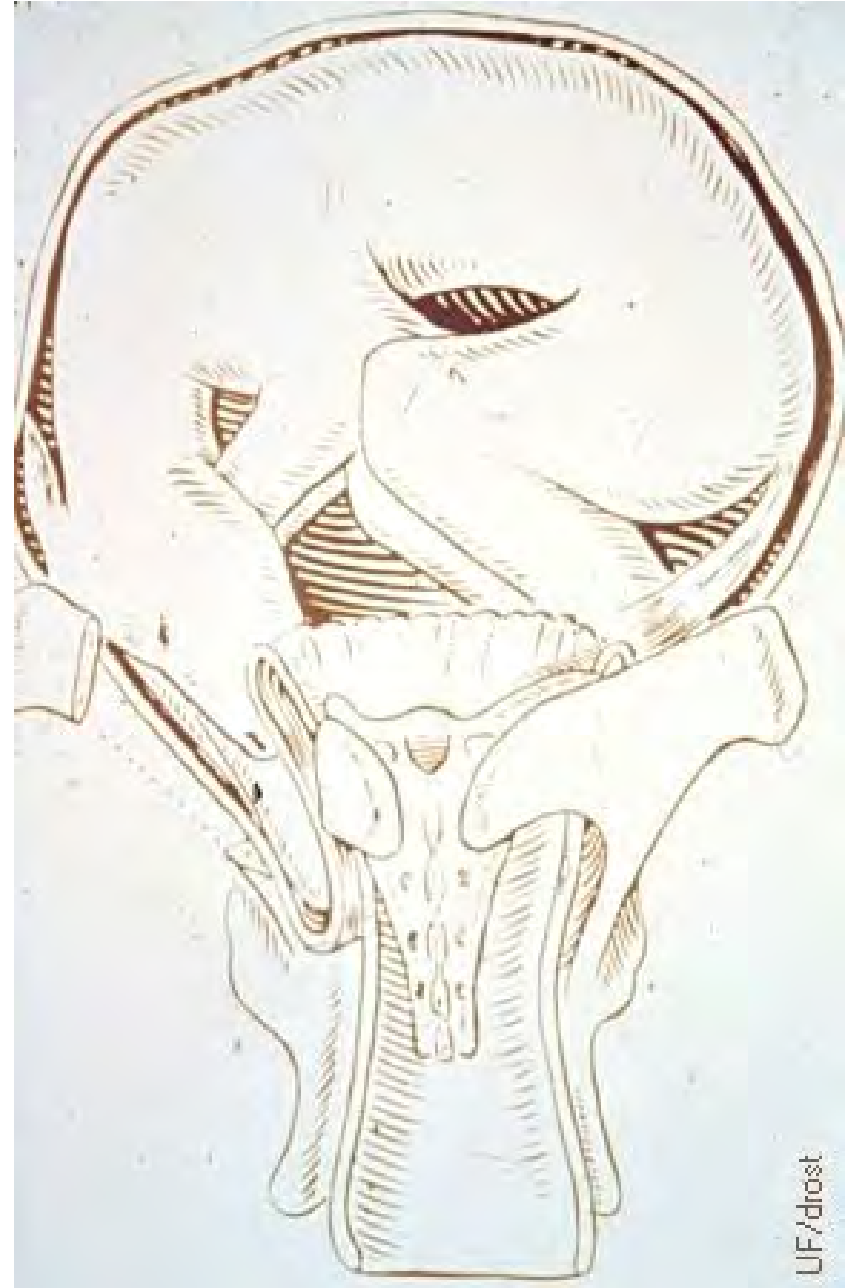
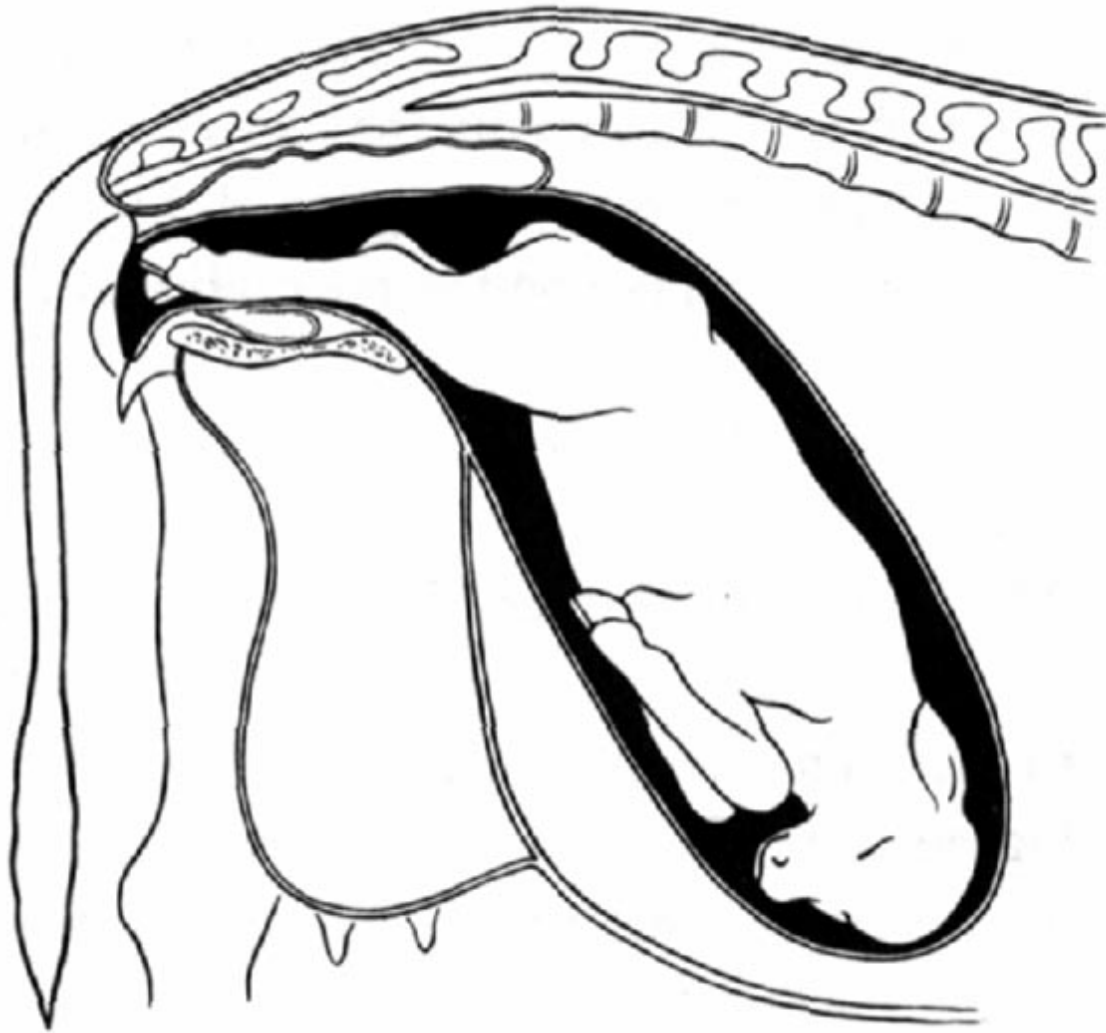
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PRESENTATION

- Relation of the spinal axis of the fetus to the dam's axis
- Forwards
- Backwards
- Transverse (rare)
- 13-22% of all dystocias
- 5x higher risk of stillbirth

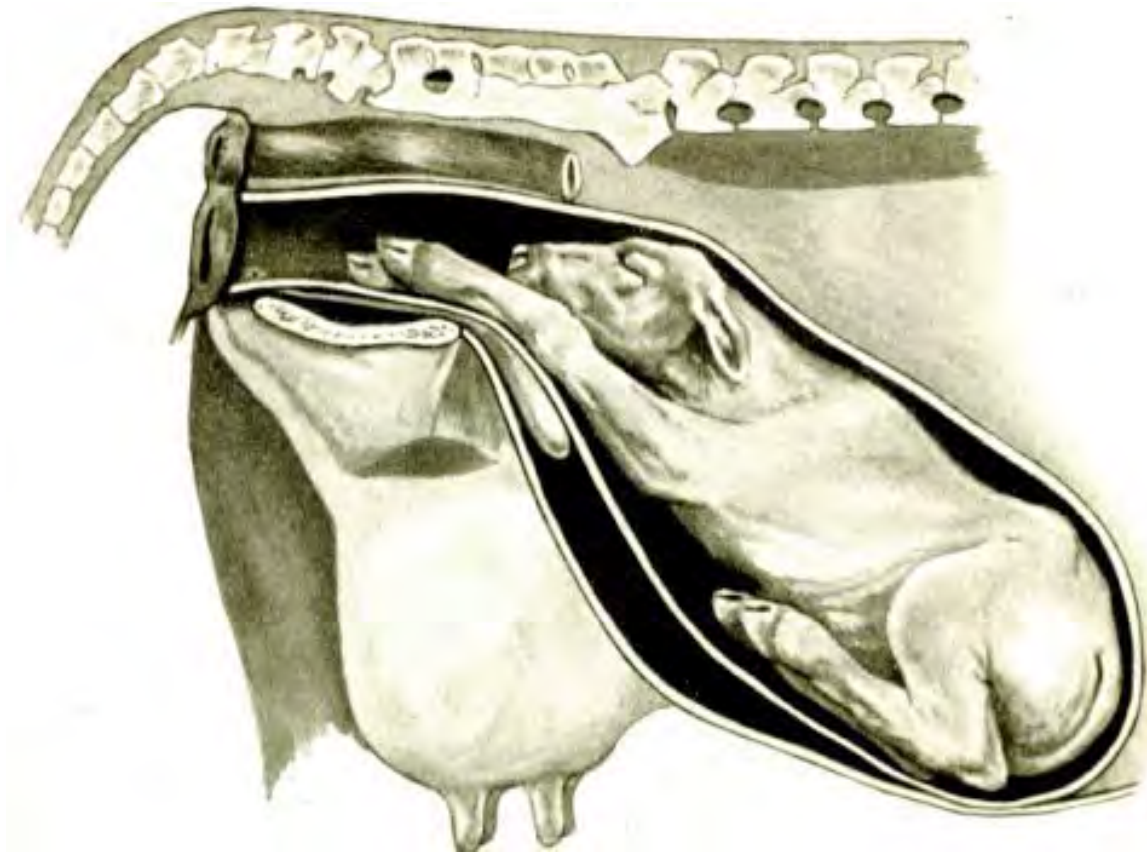


ABNORMAL

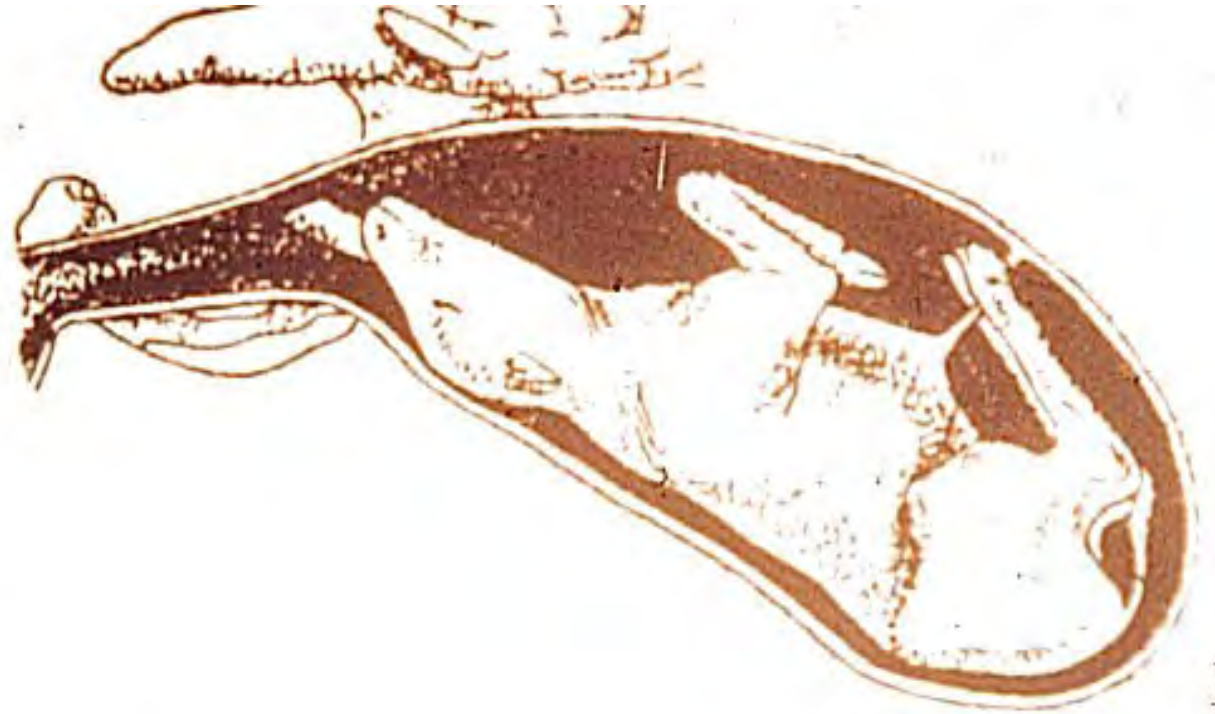


POSITION

- The relation of the dorsum of the fetus to the quadrants of the maternal pelvis
- Right side up (Dorsosacral)
- Upside down (Dorsopubic)
- Angled on its side (Dorsoilliac)



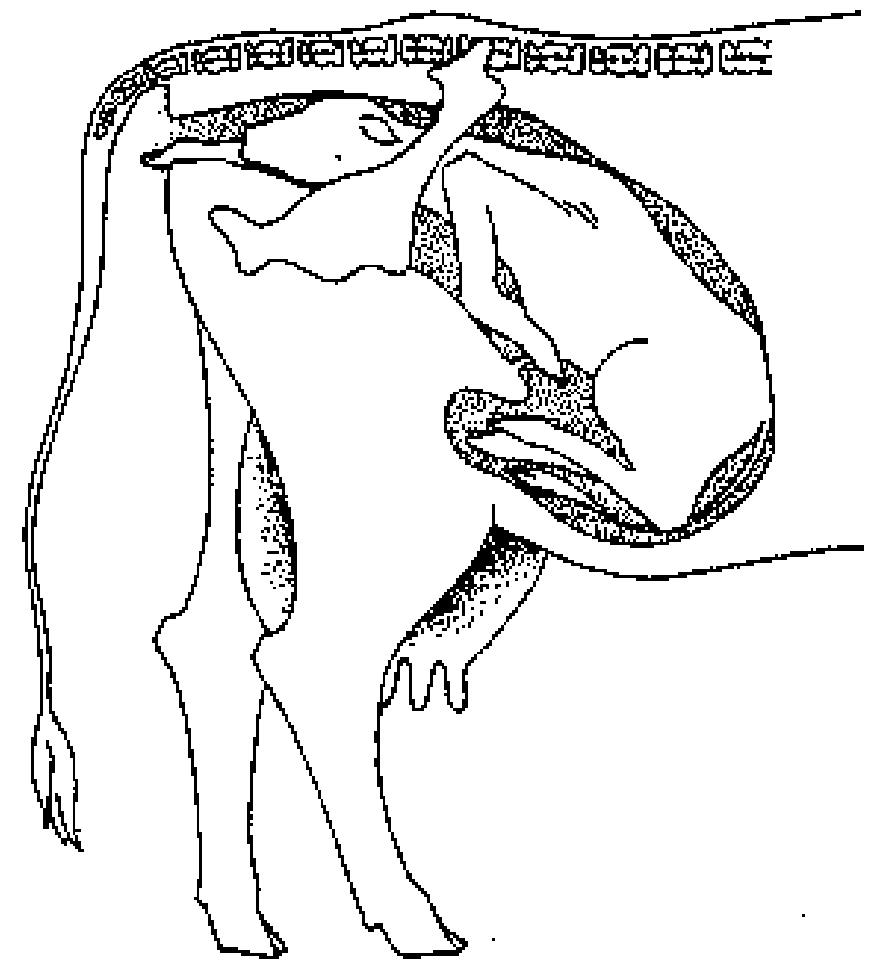
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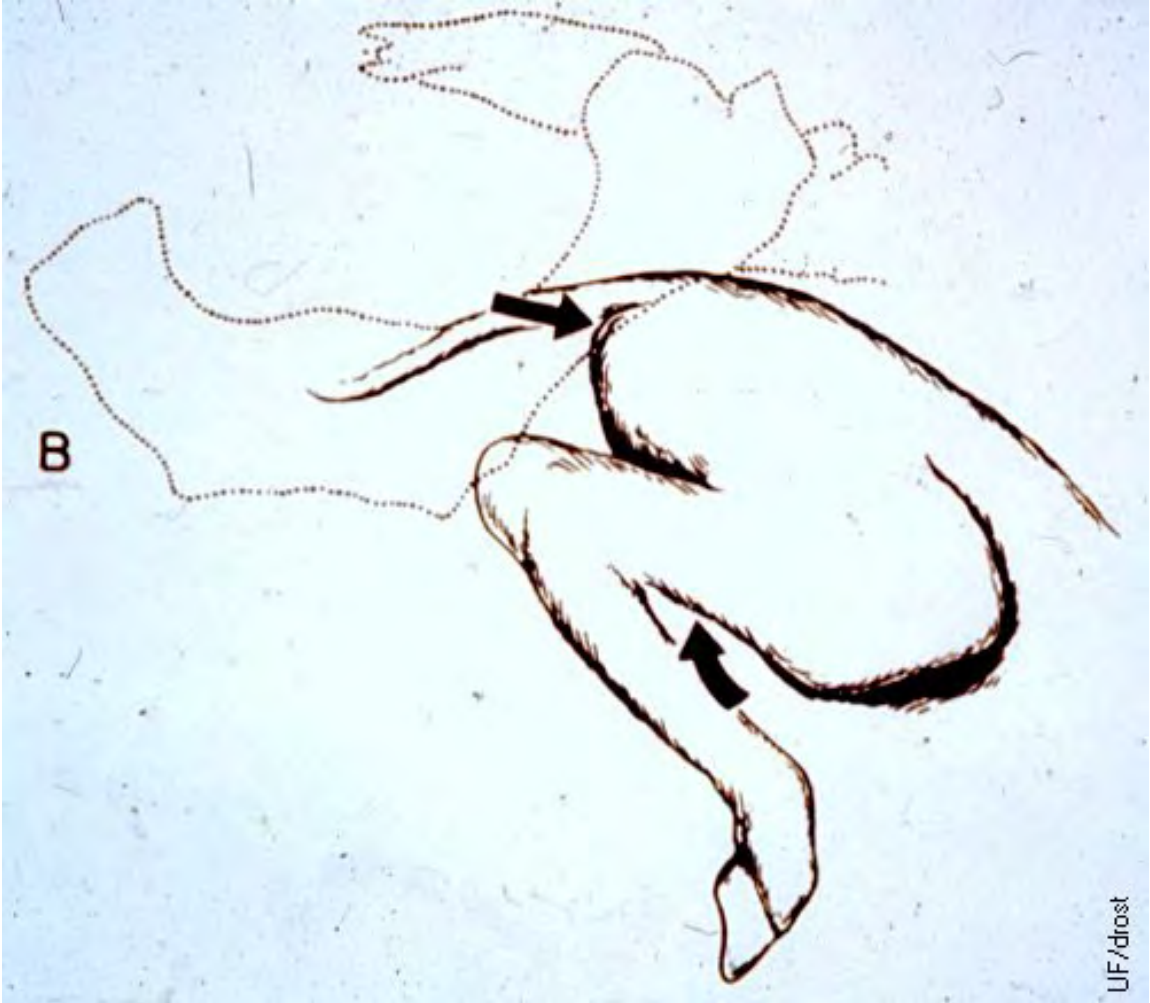
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POSTURE

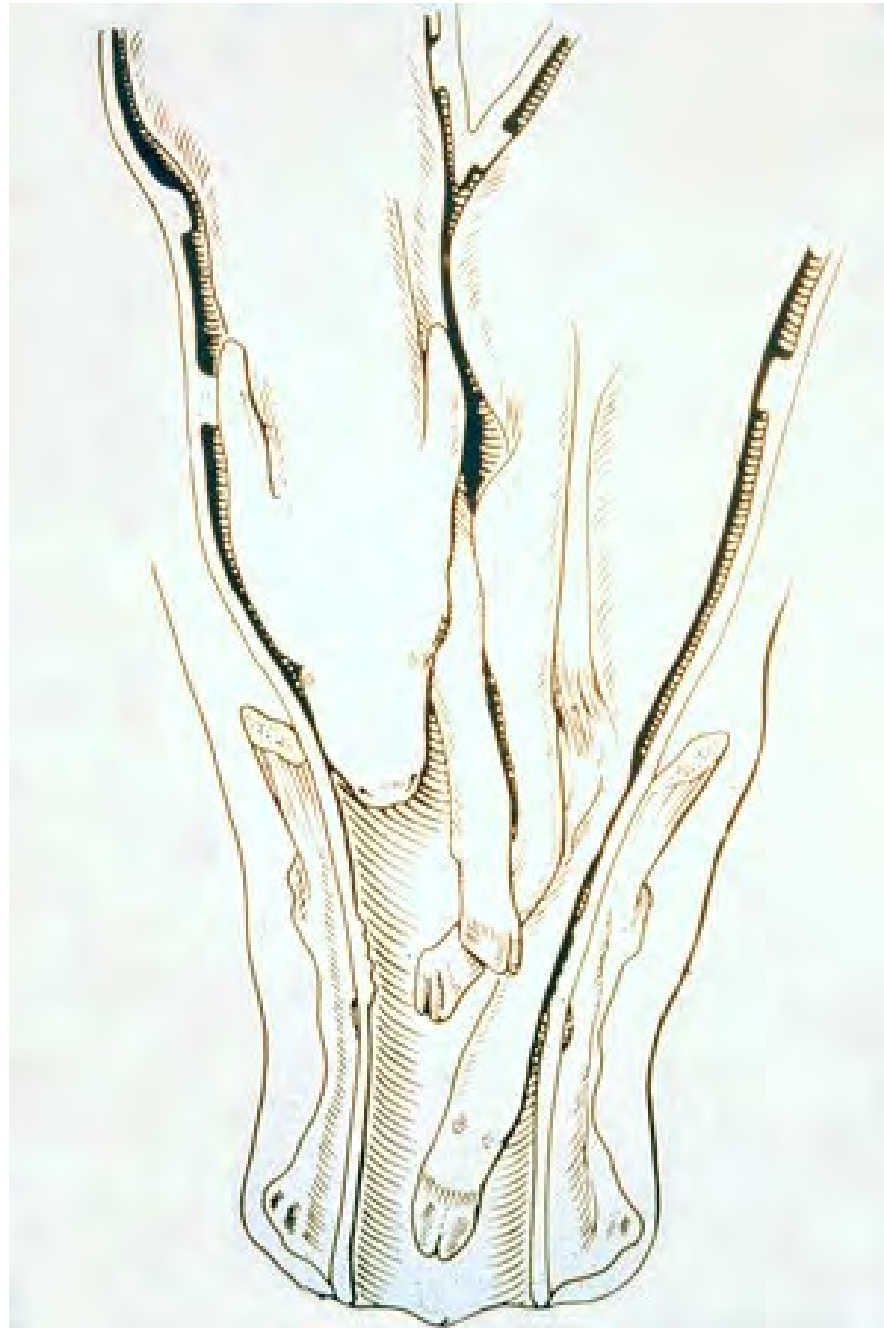
- Relation of the fetal extremities to its own body
 - Head back (Head ventroflexed)
 - Leg bent at the knee (Carpal flexion)
 - Breech (Hips bilaterally flexed)
- 20-40% of dystocias



TRUE BREECH



TWINS



**GETTING READY TO
PULL**



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The Rule of 3

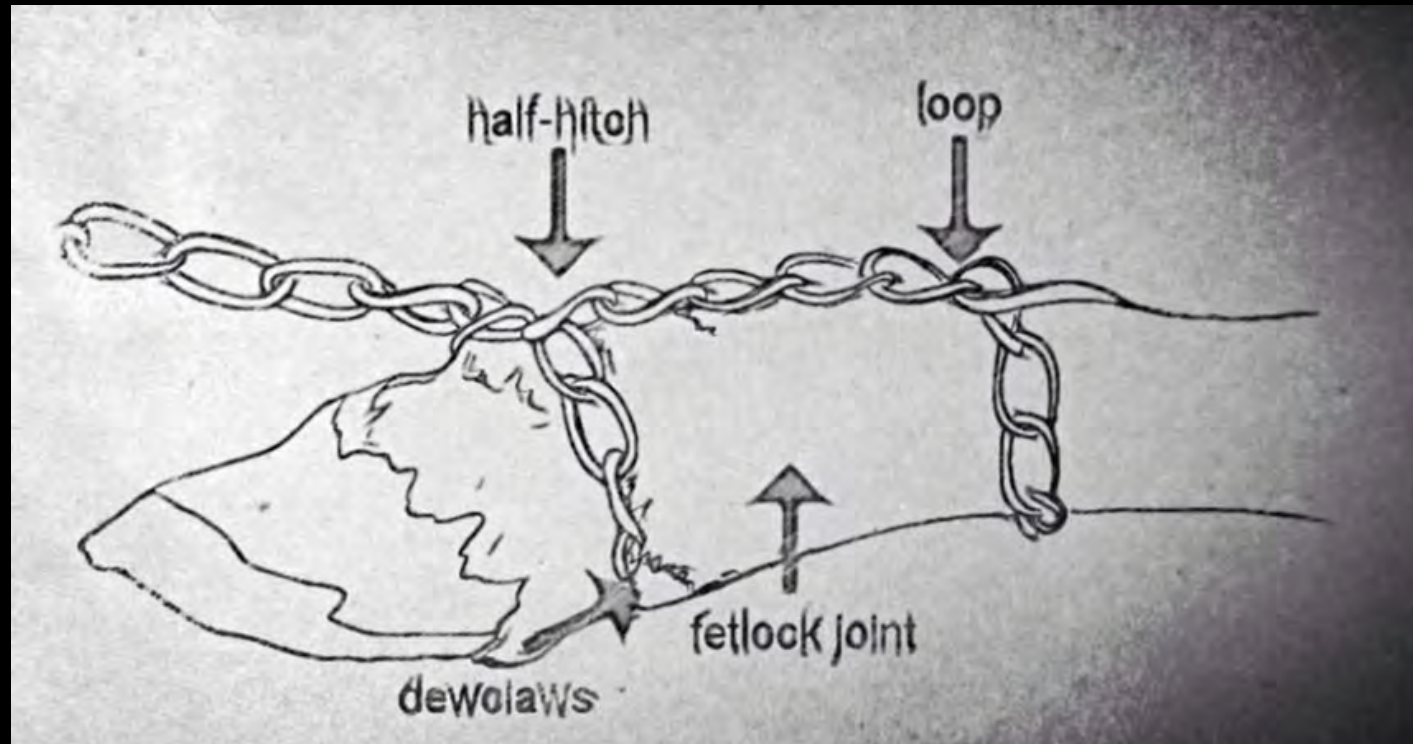
2 limbs (+ head/tail) are in normal position and belong to the same calf

Will It Fit?

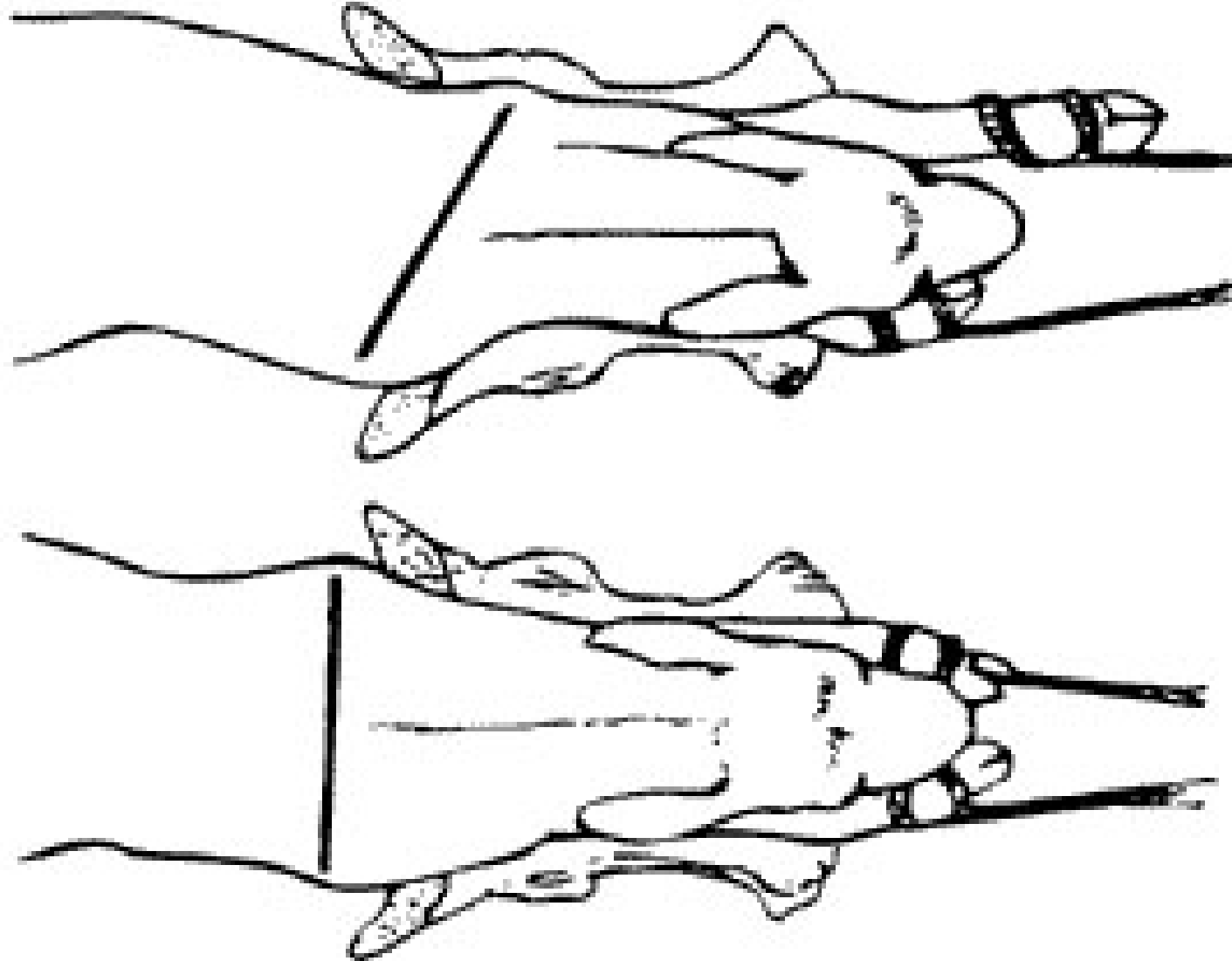


- Head and legs of the calf should be able to be advanced into the birth canal
- Hand should be able to go around calf when positioned in the birth canal

Getting Ready to Pull



PULL ONE LIMB AT A TIME (SEE-SAW)



PREVENTING HIP LOCK

- Once head and front limbs are out and chest is in birth canal, rotate calf 45 degrees to prevent hip lock

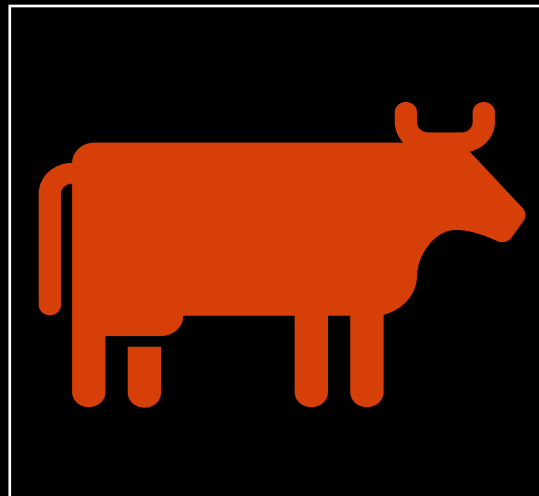


When To Call the Vet

**Unsure what you
are feeling
“3Ps”**



**Unable to correct a
malpositioned calf
in 30 min.**



**Calf won't fit
(needs a c-
section)**

**“Doesn't meet the rule of
3”**



Post Calving Cow Check

“Spares and Tears!”

Post-Calving Calf Care

- Sit calf in sternal recumbency
- ABCs
 - Airway – clean airway, resuscitation
 - Breathing- rub vigorously, straw up nose
 - Circulation – check heartbeat



QUESTIONS?

