Made It Myself

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Calf Drying Pen "Secret" To Early Calving Success

North Dakota rancher Sylvester Salwey, of Orrin, says the low-cost calf drying pen he built is the "secret" to the spectacular success he and his wife Mary Jane have had with early mid-January calving of their 130 cow beef herd.

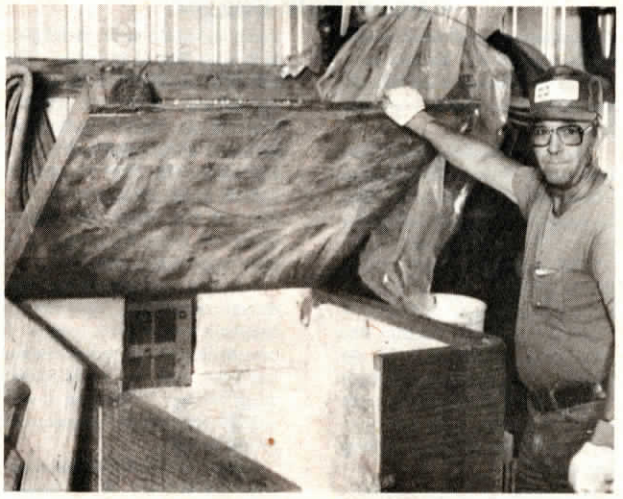
In the past two years, the Salweys have only lost two calves, despite calving in mid-winter when outside temperatures on their ranch, located only about 60 miles from the Canadian border, are generally well below zero much of the time.

As soon as calves are born in an inside maternity pen, and after they have nursed, they're moved into the 4 by 4 by 4 ft. drying pen — if the temperature inside the barn falls below about 20°. The "dryer" is made of 1/2 in. plywood and lined on the inside four sides with 2 in. thick styrofoam insulation. Drying heat is provided by an ordinary household 110-V electric heater which cost only $87.

"With the hinged lid partially open, we've had as many as four newborn calves in the small drying pen at one time," says Sylvester. "We generally leave them in the pen for about two hours, depending on how cold it is and what time of the day or night they're born."

After drying, the calves and their mothers are moved to a holding pen with other cows that have have calved. "We've had no trouble whatsoever with cows refusing to accept their calf when they're returned from the drying pen," says Mary Jane.

She notes that the drying pen serves an important role in preventing frozen



ears, tails or feet on calves born in mid-winter. "For example, if a buyer spots frozen ears on a feeder steer, he assumes the feet probably have also been damaged and the animal probably won't be able to carry the weight it puts on in the feedlot. Purchase price of the animal will then be discounted accordingly."

The Salweys use five A-frame shelters (11 by 12 ft. and with a 28 by 32 in. opening) in the outside corral to provide free choice shelter for calves. Each hut holds about 20 calves.

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Home-Made Seed Sizer Boosts Wheat Yields

John Ruff is convinced that planting only the biggest wheat kernels produces a substantially higher yield on good, fertile ground.

Two years ago, the Logan, Kan., wheat producer built his own "test model" wheat seed sizer which separates large wheat kernels from smaller ones.

"It does an excellent job of sizing but is slow, sizing at the rate of only a bushel of plump seed per hour," says Ruff. "I'd buy a commercial sizer if one was available close by. But I haven't been able to find one. I tried several seed cleaners but you can't size wheat seed with them. I built this prototype only because I didn't have any other options available."

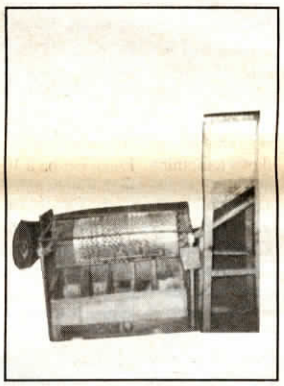
Ruff has tested the effects of large wheat seed on yield for the past two years. The first year, he planted half of a 20 acre test plot with sized seed; the other half with bin-run seed. "We'd plowed up an alfalfa field and it was a dry year. The bin-run plot averaged 21 bu. an acre and the sized plot 28 bu., plus the latter was 2 lbs. higher in test weight."

The home-made sizer only cost Ruff about $15 to build from scrap parts. Wheat is sized inside a 20 in. long drum built from 10 in. ducting pipe. The drum, which Ruff calls "a glorified sieve with different size holes," lies horizontally on a stand. It's separated into five fields, each with different size holes which Ruff punched out one a time.

An electric motor, salvaged from an old furnace blower motor, turns the drum at 21 rpm's. Ruff used several old combine pulleys to build a 3-stage belt reduction drive which regulates drum speed. The drum has only a slight slope, about 1 in. from top to bottom end. "Any more slope and the wheat slides out the end wihout sizing," he says. Three rods run lengthwise through the drum, agitating the wheat to increases rate of separation.

During the first two years that Ruff used the sizer, only about 33% of the wheat seed was large enough to be be salvaged. But, in sizing for planting this past fall, that figure increased to 45%. "I don't know if this is because we had an exceptionally favorable growing season, or because two years of planting sized seed has improved my wheat stock."

Ruff says he's stayed with the same planting rate he used before building the sizer — 1 bu. per acre.



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Modified Trailer Hauls 34 Bales

R. L. "Butch" Carraway hauls 34 big round bales at once on a modified 45-ft. long trailer with a 21-in. drop deck. He uses the trailer to custom-haul some 6,000 bales every year.

To handle bales up to 6 ft. long, he built fold-up wings 1-ft. wide that overhang each side. The wings are made from 1 3/4-in. dia. pipe welded into a rectangular frame that runs the length of the trailer. In order to fold the wings back flat onto the deck of the trailer he made hinges out of 2-in. dia. pipe and simply runs the smaller frame of the wings through the larger pipe. "Stops" to hold the wings in their extended position were made from short pieces of sucker rod welded to the pipe.

Sloping tailgates at the rear of the trailer hold bales on the back. The rear tailgates can be quickly removed

for hauling other loads. Carraway loads bales two-high and straps them down.

"We couldn't handle this many full-size bales without the added support provided by the wings," he notes, adding that he had to fit the trailer with heavy-duty springs.

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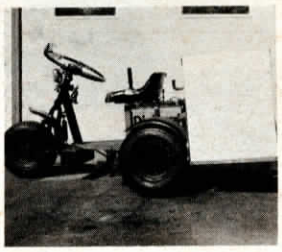
Electric Three-Wheeler

"It's quiet as can be. My boys use it to deliver papers on weekends around the neighborhood. Reduces delivery time and, since it hardly makes any noise, it doesn't wake anybody up," notes Ernie Parker, Bloomington, Minn., who built an electric-powered three-wheeler.

It's equipped with two 500 amp. deep power batteries and a 24 volt dc motor. As you drive, you press one of two switches located on the steering wheel. One runs the motor at low speed so you go about 4 mph. Pressing the second switch produces the top speed of 15 mph. For in-between speeds, you alternately press and release the switches and coast along.

The three-wheeler's front end and differential were salvaged from a Cushman golf cart. It has a hand



brake, 8-in. wheels, headlight, reflectors, horn and a 1 1/2 by 3 by 2 ft. cart attached for carrying papers.

Parker notes that the three-wheeler will run about an hour before it needs recharging.

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