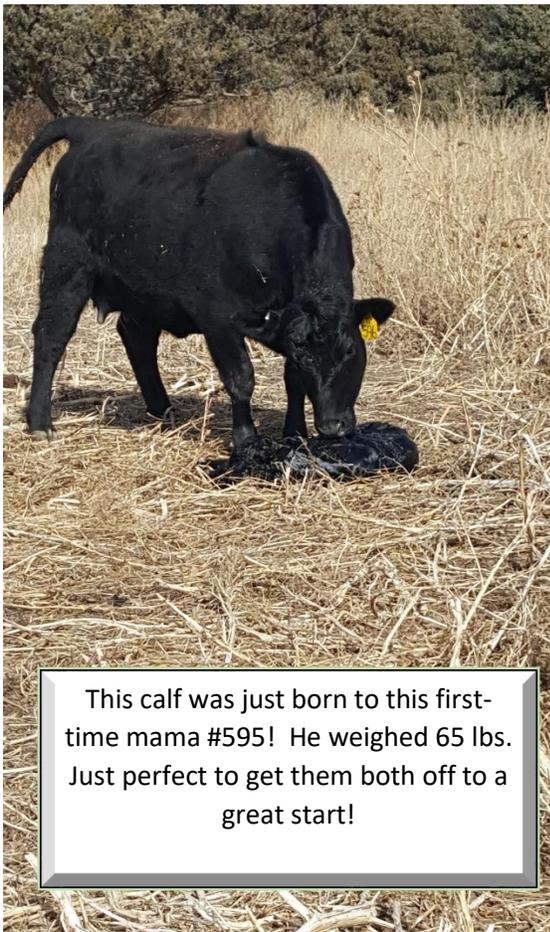




Happy Valentine's Day guys!!! I am so excited to visit with you all this semester! Can you believe it's already the middle of February!! Not sure where the time goes!! I know Mrs. Keep shared my first letter with you so you know a little bit about me and my family, but I wanted to update you on what's been happening on the farm!

It's my favorite time of year.... CALVING SEASON!!



This calf was just born to this first-time mama #595! He weighed 65 lbs. Just perfect to get them both off to a great start!

That's when all the cows have their baby calves. It's a busy time for us but it is so fun to see them all being born. They grow super-fast and they are running around in no time at all. The average calf is born weighing somewhere between 60-90 lbs. That might be more than some of you weigh right now!! There are lots of things that influence their weight at birth like the sex of the calf, the nutrition of the cow during her pregnancy, the weather conditions, and most of all, the genetics of the calf. Bull calves (the boys!) generally weigh more than the heifer calves (the girls) but not always!! If the weather is very cold during the winter, the cow will send more nutrition to the calf during her pregnancy and that can cause bigger calves to be born. Also, if a cow gets a lot of protein in her

diet, this can cause bigger birth weights. Birth weight is highly heritable (easily passed on to their babies) so if a cow herself had a very large birth weight, she is more likely to have a big baby! We try to control this by using bulls that have known birth weights on the lower side of average. We want the cow to have the calf without difficulty so the calf is born quickly and easily. Just like humans, an easy birth on mom and baby makes life A LOT easier for everyone involved and

gets the little one off to a great start!! The older cows can have a little bigger calf than a young cow, especially when it is her first one. We try to be very careful when choosing which bulls we breed the younger cows to.

Once the baby is born and we know it has gotten milk from its mama a few times, we weigh the calf and put a tag in its ear. The tag has the date of birth, the sire



(or dad) of the calf, and the cow's number. This way we can easily match up the cow and calf whenever we are

checking on them. We keep detailed records on all of the cows and calves in our herd. It is important for ranchers to keep records on everything!



Here we are weighing one of the new calves born to cow #225. Sometimes the mamas are a little protective and don't like you messing with their new babies. This cow doesn't mind but she stays close by and keeps an eye on us to make sure he's ok! We use a platform with a small scale on it to weigh the calves. Not all ranchers take individual weights but most do tag their calves at birth.



I just took this photo this morning (2/14/17). This calf (#827) is about 45 days old. He was the first calf born on our ranch. You can see how much he has grown compared to the new calves shown above. It doesn't take them long to get growing!! Can you see his milk mustache? He obviously had a milk for breakfast. I hope you did too!!

Well, I hope this catches you up a little bit on our busy farm life! And thanks so much for writing your introduction letters in January. You guys did a great job! I will try to get some of your questions answered soon and I will keep you posted on our calving progress and other chores on the farm.

Love,

The Rippe Family

Janet, Gail, Ally & Nate