



A newborn calf attempts to take its first steps.



Bruce and Peter Stewart inspect a newborn calf.



Bruce Stewart pulls a calf from its mother during a birth at Stirlane Farm in Brighton on Nov. 5, 2011. Pulling the calf minimizes the pain the mother feels during the birth.

Newborn

Story and photos by Dan Pearce

Dairy farmer Bruce Stewart calls and urges me to hurry to Stirlane Farm as quick as I can. It's a 45-minute drive on the best of days.

Several months ago, I followed Stewart around his farm, documenting the day-to-day life of a dairy farmer.

As he showed me the calves, some of which have only been alive for a week or two, he sees my eyes light up, and he smiles. He knows what I'm about to ask.

"How often are new calves born and how far in advance do you know?" I say.

Having been a dairy farmer for over 20 years, the birth of a calf is hardly a new experience for Stewart. In fact, "calving" is almost a weekly event.

Even armed with this experience, predicting the time a calf will give birth is still very much a guessing game.

"It's not an exact science," he says. "We can try and predict

the day, but even if we get it right, it's almost impossible to narrow it down to a specific time."

Undeterred, I assure Stewart that he can call me anytime, day or night. We exchanged cellphone numbers.

Several months later, I've all but given up on getting that call, but early on a Saturday morning, my cellphone's buzz raises me from a dead sleep.

"Still interested in getting some pictures of a calf birth? You better get here quick," Stewart says.

"I can be there in 30 minutes," I reply.

The farm draws closer and just as I begin to spot it far in the horizon, I get another call.

"The head and feet are out, how far away are you?" Stewart asks.

"I can see the barn. I'll be there in two minutes," I reply.

As I pull into the driveway, I begin reaching behind me to

find a lens, any lens.

I jump out of my truck and rush through the barn entrance. Stewart is waiting patiently, leaning up against a door jam.

"She's in the next room. You have to be careful and approach her slowly. She's easily startled," he says.

He opens the door and we enter slowly. She lies uneasily on her side in the Stirlane Farm milking parlour. She is in the latter stages of calf birth.

Stewart approaches the cow, careful not to upset the labouring mother. He speaks to the cow, and assures her repeatedly, "Everything is fine. You'll be okay."

All but the head and front legs are still inside the mother. Stewart wraps chains around the baby calf's front legs and looks at me.

"Are you ready?" Stewart asks.



A mother and a barn cat watch over a calf as Stewart feeds it shortly after birth. The newborn is separated from its mother within hours.



Bruce (left) and Peter Stewart leave their barn after overseeing the birth of a calf.