

## WinkWorld March 2003

Joan's Real World: Prairie Pedagogy

4:35 A.M.

Coffee is brewing, and the temperature gauge reads -20 degrees. Ugh! It's going to be a trying morning for ranchers. At these temperatures water tanks freeze, tractors and pickups are hard to start and animals need more feed in order to generate body heat.

It is especially hard on ranchers that are calving. Calves born when it is this cold sometimes never get up and nurse. Their wet newborn bodies chill down too soon. If they're lucky, they just lose their ears and tails that freeze.

There are two philosophies of when to calve on the northern plains. Calve early so the calves have more time to grow before you sell them in the Fall. We still get paid by the pound! Or, calve later when the weather is warmer, and chances are better the calves will survive. The calves will be lighter because they're younger, but you'll probably have more of them.

Calving in February, you hope for mild weather. Hope is not a very good management tool, but all ranchers do it. When you're in a business that depends so much on the weather, hope is a part of life. If you've chosen ranching as a career, you better be prepared to accept what Mother Nature has to offer and deal with it.