

# FAVORITE FINDS

Four Angus operations share the tools and tactics they can't live without — especially during calving season.

by Kindra Gordon, field editor

It is said “necessity is the mother of invention,” and on farms and ranches, it seems necessity comes up rather frequently. This generates several practical tools and ideas to solve problems and assist with tasks. Four Angus operators took time out of their busy schedules to share the tools they've come to rely upon during calving season, as well as a few favorite items they use to effectively manage their cattle businesses during the rest of the year.

## Clever calving ideas

A two-wheel cart that can be hooked to the ATV is the most-used tool during calving season at Mogck & Sons Angus, near Olivet, S.D., in the southeastern corner of the state. Charles and LeAndra Mogck and their children — Christy, Chase and Ty — calve 300 registered Angus cows and 100 registered Angus replacement heifers annually.

Of their calf cart, Christy explains, “Most cows will follow their calves on the cart into any barn or pen.” Additionally, the cart is equipped with an electronic scale, which she reports, “saves on time and guarantees a quick and accurate birth weight for our records.”

During calving season, the Mogcks like using small metal tags, similar to Bang's tags and reasonably priced. The metal tags are clipped to a calf's ear immediately following birth to identify each calf.

Christy shares that by delaying putting in plastic tags, the family has had fewer issues with frozen calf ears in cold weather. Even after the calf receives a plastic tag, the metal clip remains in the calf's ear. Christy says the metal clip “is very helpful if a plastic tag is lost

## TOOLS TO PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS SUCCEED

throughout the calf's lifetime.”

At the Wagonhammer Ranches in the Nebraska Sandhills, most of the registered Angus herd calves in pens outside the calving barn, out of the wind. However, warming boxes are in each calving barn to assist if needed with calf recovery during cold or wet, wintry weather.

In those weather events, Joe Epperly, director of genetics and

sales at Wagonhammer, explains that newborn calves are brought in, dried off and kept in the barn with their mama for at least 12 hours. Then, calves heading outside in cold temperatures are outfitted with a fleece mask for 24-48 hours to keep their ears warm. Epperly estimates that the fleece coverings (available at <http://www.balacalfa.ca/>) have reduced frozen ears by 75%.

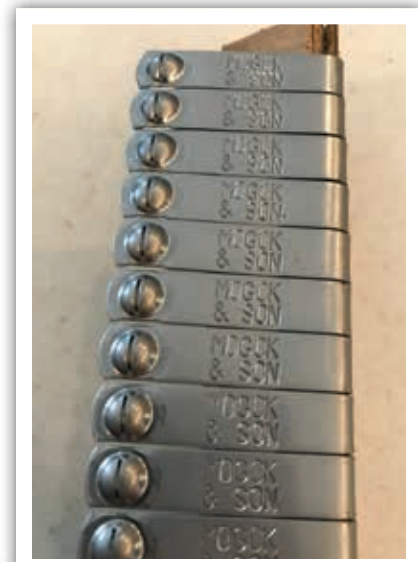
Another favorite of the Wagonhammer ranch crew is the versatile — and portable — calving pen by Wedekind Mfg. Epperly explains that the pen includes a squeeze gate that works in place of a chute if a cow must be restrained to pull a calf or to graft a calf to a cow.

Additionally, the Wagonhammer crew keeps a few nurse cows on hand during calving season, which Epperly calls “one of our best tools.” He explains: “With 1,500 cows and

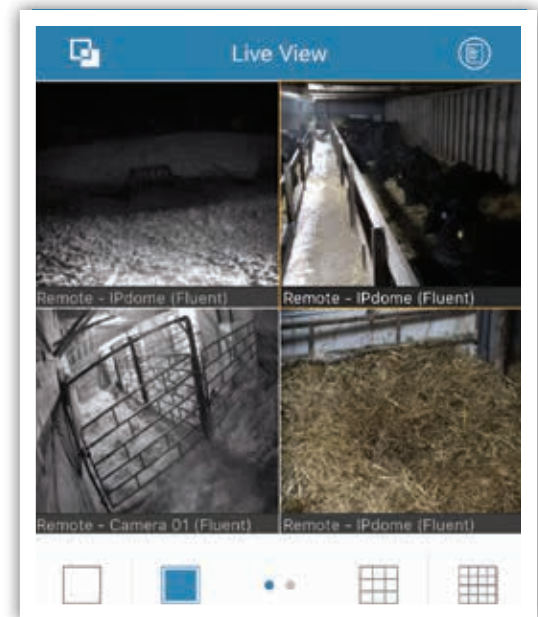
500 heifers calving in spring, a nurse cow saves us countless hours bottle-feeding and teaching calves to nurse if we are trying to graft them to another cow.”

Getting a birth weight on calves is also part of the Wagonhammer calving protocol. So, each cowboy's gear includes a calf cradle scale

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A metal clip, similar to a Bang's tag, is put on each newborn calf's ear at Mogck & Sons Angus in South Dakota. The clip is used as an identifier for a while instead of a plastic tag, and has helped reduce frostbitten ears.



Above: Cameras help the Mogck family monitor the calving barn and pens. They've been using this tool for a decade.

Left: A two-wheeled cart equipped with an electronic scale is an item used daily by the Mogcks during calving season.



with a support beam that fits in the tow hitch of a pickup or side-by-side.

### Cameras, too

With advancements in technology, many cattle operations use video cameras to provide an extra set of eyes during calving season. The Mogcks have relied on cameras during calving season for more than 10 years. In that time, they have continued to upgrade their cameras as technology has improved. Christy shares that they currently use five cameras to monitor both their barn space and outside calving areas. She says the investment has been well worth it.

“The number of calves that we save pays for the cameras each year,” she says.

Their current camera system even allows for viewing all the cameras on their phones — even if they are away from the farm.

Likewise, at Hoffmann Angus Farms near Wheatland, N.D., Dallas Hoffmann says the investment in cameras in their calving barn a few years ago ranks among his favorite calving tools.

“Adding cameras has allowed us to be more efficient during calving season,” he explains. “We don’t

### Tech Tools

Technology is becoming a key component of cattle work.

“When we are doing herd work on our purebred Angus cows, the Angus Mobile app is one of the handiest tools to have,” says Dallas Hoffmann, Hoffmann Angus Farms of North Dakota.

On the Wagonhammer Ranches in Nebraska, Joe Epperly counts social media as an important advertising tool.

“Whether we are marketing commercial bred heifers, show heifers or bulls, we get the most bang for our buck there,” he notes.

need to go running out to check something every 15 or 30 minutes.”

He likes that their cameras are able to zoom in on things and move 360°. They are able to see everything that goes on in that barn. Even if he calved during a warmer time of year, he says he’d still invest in the cameras.

“It just makes things easier,” says Hoffmann.

### Handy-dandy halter

For Tiffany Stoller, who operates Bear Mountain Angus at Palisade, Neb., with her husband, Brian, and daughters Reagan and Mckinley, the one tool that is always with her is a simple rope halter.

“It is the one thing I must have in my pickup, my 4-wheeler or my side-by-side,” she says. “I use the halter on a daily basis, and it has many uses.”

Stoller says her favorite use for the halter is to cinch it around a wire gate that is too tight that she otherwise could not open with just her arm strength. She also uses the halter to drag things around with her 4-wheeler, such as moving feedbunks to and from pens. And, the rope halter has come in handy for Stoller to hold panels together more securely when working cattle. She has even used the halter in impromptu situations during calving to pull a calf that just needs a little extra help.

“Of course,” she concludes, “you can also use a rope halter for its real purpose of breaking and working with show cattle.”

### A few more

What other tools do these cattle producers value? In Nebraska,



At Wagonhammer Ranches in the Nebraska Sandhills, homemade fleece masks are put on newborn calves for a few days during extremely cold weather to minimize frostbitten ears.

Epperly says, “It’s hard to imagine ranching in the Sandhills without a horse and a side-by-side. We do our cow work horseback and almost everything else on a side-by-side.”

North Dakota’s Hoffmann says a bale processor is “something I don’t know how we got along without.” He says adding this equipment to their operation to shred bales has resulted in them using 30% less bedding. In addition, he says, they are able to feed cows on cornstalks with much less waste, and one person is able to complete the task that used to require three or four people.

Hoffmann also recognizes that people can be important assets within the operation. He points to having a trusted veterinarian who can help provide answers — and save calves — if things go awry.

“While not a ‘tool,’” Hoffmann emphasizes, “an understanding wife during calving, breeding, and especially during date night when a neighbor calls and says that your cows are 5 miles down the road is without question the most important part in being able to have livestock.”

Editor’s note: Kindra Gordon is a freelance writer and cattlegirl from Whitewood, S.D.



At Bear Mountain Angus, Tiffany Stoller keeps a rope halter with her for a multitude of uses, including to help with opening wire gates that are too tight, and even pulling a calf.



PHOTOS COURTESY BEAR MOUNTAIN ANGUS