

# ISU Graduates Deliver Quadruplet Calves

Steve Servantez\*

At 7 p.m. on the evening of July 14, 1987, Dr. Matt Smith (ISU '87) and Dr. Truman Mostrom (ISU '56) were summoned to the farm of Mr. Lloyd Pope of rural Clear Lake, Iowa. Mr. Pope's 13-year-old shorthorn cow was experiencing difficulty in expelling her calf. Upon arrival, Dr. Mostrom examined the cow and instructed Dr. Smith to go in and pull the calf. The calf was extracted and, due to the small size, Dr. Mostrom anticipated another calf. Dr. Smith pulled the second calf. At this point, Mr. Pope jokingly suggested that Matt check to see if there were any more calves in the uterus. As Dr. Mostrom and Mr. Pope chuckled, Matt informed them he felt three more front limbs! To everyone's surprise, two more live calves were extracted.

The four calves, two bulls and two heifers, only weighed 25 lbs. each and were capable of walking underneath their mother with no problem at all. The dam was weak after the birth and not producing enough colostrum. Luckily, colostrum was obtained from a nearby dairy farm and fed to the calves.

The odds against such a birth occurring are astronomical. The likelihood of twins in shorthorn cattle is only 2%, .02% for triplets. The probability of quadruplets has not even been calculated. All four of the calves going full term and being born alive was even more amazing. The cow was naturally serviced with a shorthorn bull and *no* fertility drugs of any kind were administered.

On July 16, one of the calves began running a temperature. Dr. Mostrom conducted a blood transfusion with the dam's blood. The calf responded, but soon relapsed and required another transfusion three days later. Subsequent blood tests revealed a WBC of under 1000; normal WBC count should be between 4000-12000.

On August 19, the sick calf was referred to Iowa State University. On August 21, the calf died. The necropsy revealed a congenital immunodeficiency problem.

Currently, the other three calves are up to 70 lbs. each and doing well. Despite the celebrity status the calves have received, they will probably be destined for market. According to Mrs. Pope, twin heifers don't breed back very well and the Popes don't keep any bulls on the farm.



\*Mr. Servantez is a third-year student in the College of Veterinary Medicine at Iowa State University.



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