



**NEW CALF DROP** — This year 28 calves were born at the University of Alaska's Musk Ox Farm, bringing the total herd to 121. Above,

cows and calves graze peacefully in the pasture. Mother and baby can easily recognize each other at nursing time. (UA photo)

## 28 Musk Ox Calves Born This Spring- Domesticated Musk Ox Give Birth Yearly

**FAIRBANKS** — Springtime at the University of Alaska's Musk Ox Farm means two things—calves and qiviut.

Twenty-eight calves were born this spring at the farm near the university's Fairbanks campus, bringing the total herd to 121.

The first calf was born May 1, and the last one arrived May 29. Domesticated musk oxen on the farm here give birth yearly, while in their wild state they nurse their young for a longer period and give birth

every other year.

Calves are born in the field, but under the watchful eye of a herdsman should any assistance be needed. Most weigh about 24 pounds when they are born, and are standing and nursing within an hour after birth.

This year 21 males and seven females were born, reversing the male-female ratio of other years which had heavily favored females.

The tough, sturdy babies are soon running and playing boisterously among themselves. Musk ox mothers will often leave their young in the care of one cow to spend several hours browsing away from the young. But come feeding time, each cow readily recognizes her own calf.

May is indeed the busy month on the 142-acre farm, for during that period the musk oxen shed their soft woolly underfur, known as qiviut. The animals are taken to the barn daily where

herdsmen pluck the great shaggy beasts as the qiviut works loose through the long guardhairs.

The qiviut is spun commercially into yarn, and then knitted into lacy garments by villagers throughout Alaska, providing a supplemental income for many rural families.

An adult musk-oxen, which can weigh from 600 to 800 pounds depending on his age and sex, usually yields about six pounds of qiviut each spring. The gossamer-light fur is soft, yet incredibly warm and strong. Only four ounces are needed to knit a scarf four feet long.

Ultimate goal of the project is to transport animals to village field stations, where, working through a cooperative, villagers will herd and care for the animals, collecting the qiviut themselves in the spring when it is shed.

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