

Grandma Has A Calf



A 28 year-old cow called Grandma walks across her Stony Point Road pasture with her latest calf , born two days ago in Santa Rosa.

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By JULIE JOHNSON

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The matriarch cow of a family farm off Stony Point Road in west Santa Rosa gave birth to a calf before dawn Tuesday morning. Nothing new about a cow giving birth, except that Grandma, as they call her, is about 28 years old, far older than the average life span of a cow and even older than the average birthing age of a cow.

“I thought she was just having a good winter, gaining weight from the hay,” said Thomas Kampmann, 80, Grandma’s keeper. “It didn’t even enter my mind she was having a calf.”

The average life expectancy of a cow is between 10 and 12 years old, said Dr. Gene Harlan, who’s worked as a veterinarian with the Cotati Large Animal Hospital since 1974. A 20-year-old is the oldest cow Harlan’s ever seen give birth during his career, he said. “When you think about a 28-year-old cow, that would be more like an 80-year-old woman having a baby,” Harlan said.

Grandma, Angus-Holstein cross, kept bellowing early Tuesday, causing Kampmann’s neighbor Brandi Malarich, 32, to step out of her home office and peer into the pasture. She saw Grandma licking clean a brand new heifer.

“I think Grandma had a calf,” Malarich said over the phone to Kampmann.

The newborn heifer, silky brown with a white-tipped tail, paused in its chase after its mother Thursday morning, nervous about passing through an opening in a fence.

“You can do it,” coaxed Kampmann's son, Luke Kampmann, 47, who helps his father watch over the animals. She paused, then leaped through the opening and continued after her mother, dark brown with white spots and graying rump, who walked with the gait of a cow who's been around the block, so to speak, compared to the three cows and one bull — all her offspring — in the pasture.

“Every time she has another calf we think, gosh, this must be a record,” Luke Kampmann said.

She's given birth to between 15 and 20 heifers and bulls over the years. She eats grass, oat hay and alfalfa hay — never grains, like many dairy cows.

Kampmann got Grandma when another son moved to Orland near Chico 28 years ago and left her behind, he said.

“This one has never eaten grain and she's never been on anything but grass,” Kampmann said. “She's had a pretty natural life.” End