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Bob White, interviewee

Stephen Lay, interviewer

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Series: University focus series

Bob White said feeding the musk ox six or seven times a day takes a lot of manpower. They have had a number of volunteers assisting them. There have been five or six people doing the feeding and the animals of course associate with them well. The university has been studying musk ox for several years and work is being done in the field and in Fairbanks. Currently the bulk of the work is taking place in Fairbanks at the musk ox farm. White said there are two main studies going on. They are raising young musk ox calves on a bottle-feeding condition so they are imprinted on humans. This makes them highly tractable so they can lead them into metabolism chambers and that kind of thing. The animals are about six weeks old and they are growing well. They are imprinting on them and easy to handle. They are not just raising the animals, but doing experiments. They are working out growth efficiencies and the efficiency of conversion of foods to body solids in the animals. Raising the calves is a study in itself and a commitment to future musk ox research. The university musk ox which were captured in the wild have not really adapted to man. The adults in the herd are difficult to handle which makes certain types of research all but impossible since the animals find their encounters with man very stressful. By raising the calves to be accustomed to the presence people researchers will have calm animals to work with in the future. The calves were taken from their mothers to be completely raised by humans when the animals were four days old. The calves have done well. They have gained weight and are readily adapting to their two-legged substitute parents. White is pleased with the animals' response and the success of raising them by humans. He said this is the first time they have raised musk ox. There was one raised on a bottle in Norway before. There have been others raised on previous projects here, but they could not find any documentation in the literature about musk ox being raised on the bottle. After they got the milk composition right it has been a fairly easy process. They are now down to four feedings a day. The animals come easily to the bottle to feed. They are completely imprinted on them like a small dairy calf. The four calves are kept separated from the main herd. They and perhaps future bottle-raised musk ox will form the basis for a special research herd of tractable animals. All the university's musk ox are kept on the farm on Yankovich Road. In the past viewing them has been a popular attraction for summer visitors. White said the animals at the musk ox farm are viewable from the road. Those are the adults. Anyone who goes up there can walk along the fence on the west side of the farm and see them resting in the trees. The calves they are raising for research are being raised in the pen next to the barn.

Stephen Lay reports on activities on campus for the week.