

AG NEWS AND REVIEWS

*by OSU Extension Agent
Leland McDaniel*

for The Sunday Ardmoreite: Sunday Oct. 21, 2007

Calving Season Length . . .

I may seem an odd time to be discussing calving season length, but the breeding season for fall calving herds is just a few weeks away and if one were thinking about tightening the calving season on a spring-calving herd some prerequisite planning is best done months ahead. The advantages of concise calving seasons versus year-round calving are an age-old debate in the cattle industry.

Research using 394 ranch observations from the Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico SPA (Standardized Performance Analysis) data set provides insight to this argument about “leaving the bull out” or having a defined breeding and calving season. A positive relationship was found between number of days of the breeding season and the cost per hundredweight of calf weaned. Also, they reported a negative relationship between number of days of the breeding season and pounds of calf weaned per cow per year.

The data suggested that for each day the breeding season was lengthened, the annual cost of producing 100 pounds of weaned calf increased by 4.7 cents and pounds of calf weaned per cow per year decreased by 0.158 pound. The range of breeding seasons in the data set was 11 to 365 days.

The producer who leaves the bull out year-round (365 days) had \$13.63 greater costs per hundredweight of weaned calf than the producer who used a 75-day breeding season. That same producer sold 45.82 fewer pounds of calf per cow per year on the average than producers with a 75-day breeding season.

How to Start A Controlled Calving Season . . .

In most herds on a year-round calving season, a natural calving concentration already exists. Nutrition is the major factor responsible for cows cycling and conceiving. Since pastures are usually at their peak of quality in spring and early summer, a natural concentration of calving may occur in late winter and spring. No system of getting on a controlled breeding program can completely eliminate the delaying of some cows from their current calving schedule. However, by taking advantage of the natural concentration in a herd, the problem can be minimized.

A system for converting from a year-round to a 90-day controlled calving season over a period of three years would present less loss and fewer problems than to try to convert in one year. The following steps are suggested for getting on a controlled breeding system:

1. Build a good, strong bull pen or well-fenced bull pasture. An electric fence in addition to regular fence may be needed.
2. Remove the bulls from the herd. Select removal date to coincide with the latest date you want calves born.
3. Sixty days after removing the bulls from the herd (or at a convenient time near this date), pregnancy check all cows and cull all non-pregnant dry breeding-age females that have been exposed to the bull and all non-pregnant cows with calves five months of age or older.
4. Put the bulls back with the herd the first year so that calving season will be six months long.

5. Start breeding replacement heifers 20 to 30 days ahead of the final long-range planned breeding date for your herd.
6. In the second year, follow the same system as outlined above except start breeding so that calving season will be about 4 ½ months long.
7. The third year, follow the same system as outlined above, except start the breeding season so that calving will be 75 to 90 days. Also, cull all open cows this year when pregnancy checking regardless of age of their calves. The breeding season may be reduced even further in the following years.

Maintaining a controlled breeding and calving season can be one of the most important management and most profitable tools for cow-calf producers. A uniform, heavier, and more valuable calf crop is one key reason for keeping the breeding season short. Plus, more efficient cow supplementation and cow herd health programs are a product of a short breeding season.

“There has been a lot said about the sacredness of our land which is our body; and the values of our culture which is our soul; but water is the blood of our tribes, and if its life-giving flow is stopped, or it is polluted, all else will die and the many thousands of years of our communal existence will come to an end.” – Frank Tenorio

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services.