

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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In this Issue:

Normalizing Live Cattle Trade in North America

Derrell S. Peel, OSU Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

This is the Year to Start a Controlled Calving Season

Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Cattle Reproduction Specialist

Normalizing Live Cattle Trade in North America

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The U.S. Mexican and Canadian governments announced yesterday that an agreement was reached to permit live cattle trade between the three countries that is consistent with OIE (international animal health organization) standards. Since Mexico closed the border to U.S. cattle after BSE was confirmed in late 2003, the Mexicans have delayed reopening the border despite OIE determination of controlled risk status in May 2007. Mexico has allowed limited importation of young dairy heifers for several months. A recent agreement between Mexico and Canada allowed for a flow of Canadian cattle across the U.S. into Mexico while U.S. cattle were still restricted. Texas and other states bordering Mexico declined to allow Canadian cattle to pass through those states without an agreement for U.S. cattle. This action prompted swift and intensive meetings that led to the new agreement.

Allowing U.S. and Canadian breeding cattle into Mexico will benefit all three countries. Many Mexican producers have been calling for access to more breeding stock to help rebuild depleted herds. The intensity of domestic Mexican beef markets and strong exports of feeder cattle have resulted significant shortages of breeding females in some areas in Mexico in recent years. Obviously, sellers, especially purebred breeders in the U.S. and Canada will have new market potential to meet the Mexican demand for breeding stock. The agreement also strengthens the position of all three NAFTA partners with respect to seeking science-based access to other countries.

This is the Year to Start a Controlled Calving Season

Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Cattle Reproduction Specialist

The extremely expensive inputs of feed, fertilizer, and fuel costs have caused many cow calf operations to search for methods of becoming more efficient. One place where many smaller

herds could gain some long-term efficiency is by moving to a shorter, more confined breeding season. When all the cows are bred at about the same time and are calving together, their nutritional needs are similar. By contrast, herds with long or year-round breeding seasons, have cows in different production stages consuming the same diet. Consequently, part of the cows are being underfed, or part of the cows are being over fed, or both.

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. Moving to a spring calving season may be the easiest, however, some producers will benefit by converting the year round system to a fall-calving program. No system of getting on a controlled breeding program can completely eliminate the delaying of some cows from their current calving schedule. In many situations, down-sizing the herd to those cows that more closely fit the future calving schedule may be beneficial. If fertilizer applications are reduced due to price, then lighter stocking rates will be necessary.

Following is a system for converting from year round to a 90-day controlled calving season over a period of three years that would result in less cattle culling than trying to convert in one year. The following steps are suggested for getting 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 bull from herd. Select removal date to coincide with latest date you want calves born. Look up the appropriate dates in a Gestation Table.
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 which have been running with the bull and all non-pregnant cows with calves five months of age or older.
4. Put bulls back with 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. The second year, follow the same system as outlined above except start breeding so that calving season will be about 4-1/2 months long.
7. The third year follow the same system as outlined above, except start breeding season so that calving season 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 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 cowherd health programs are a product of a short breeding season.

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