

# Are Your Cows Ready For The Calving Season?

## BLUE SPRINGS, MO.

**C**attle producers need to pay close attention to the nutritional management of pregnant cows as they approach calving, says a University of Missouri Extension livestock specialist.

“Cows need to have a body condition score (BCS) of 5 or better by calving, so their nutritional needs are very important now,” said David Hoffman.

Management of the late-gestation pregnant cow determines if and when the cow returns to cycling activity after calving, Hoffman said.

“Body condition, age of the cow and the number of days since calving are the biggest influences on whether the cow is ready for the spring breeding season,” he said.

Cows that are thin (BCS less than 5) at calving have a lower percentage cycling at the beginning of the breeding season. As body condition score increases, the percentage of cows cycling increases.

“Improvements in cow condition will lead to improved calf survival and vigor, improved quality and quantity of colostrum, and improved reproductive performance in the cow,” Hoffman said.

The age of the cow affects the cow’s ability to

rebreed. “First- and second-calf cows are harder to get to rebreed than mature cows,” he said.

The extra nutrient requirement for growth clearly limits the cycling activity at the beginning of the breeding season of 2-year-olds. “Supplementing your young cows will improve their breed-back performance,” he said.

The number of days since calving also influences the cow’s ability to rebreed. In research at Kansas State, from less than 50 days to 70 days, the percentage of cows cycling increased by 7.5 percent for every 10-day interval since calving.

“Having cows calve together in a short calving season is important because it allows for more cows to be cycling at the beginning of the breeding season,” Hoffman said.

“Management of mature cows and first-calf heifers before the calving season has a dramatic effect on your calf crop this year and, more importantly, next year’s calf crop,” he added. “A cow or heifer needs to be in good body condition before she calves if you expect her to raise a healthy calf, continue to grow – if she is a first-calf cow – and rebreed in a timely fashion to calve next year. Calving early in the calving season improves production and profitability.” Δ