

Beef Producers Learn Value Of Timed Breeding Of Cows; Uniform, High-Value Calves Result

JOPLIN, MO. Breeding beef cows by appointment on one day brings a shorter calving season and a uniform crop of high-quality calves.

“Existing technology is on the shelf and ready to use,” David Patterson, University of Missouri beef reproduction specialist, told cattle producers at a conference in Joplin.

The benefits are less labor for the use of artificial insemination (AI). Also, premium-quality calves are worth more money at market.

“The technology works,” Patterson said. It can help meet increasing demand for high-quality beef, domestic and global.

“This is an opportunity to add value to Missouri beef herds,” he said. “We just need to see wider use of what we have.”

Research on timed breeding has been underway at MU Thompson Farm, Spickard, Mo., for 15 years. The results were farm-tested on 73 herds across the state.

The MU researchers developed protocols for Show-Me-Select Replacement Heifers. The heifer program has been adopted statewide, with both spring and fall sales of bred heifers.

Now the heifer program includes a Tier Two phase that results in high-quality steers for feedlots.

Fixed-time AI protocols consistently average 62 percent of the cows bred on the first day of the breeding season.

Timed breeding of a herd on one day produces a more uniform calf crop. In several farm herds bred with fixed-time AI, 65 percent of the calves were born in the first 15 days of the calving season. In three weeks, 70 percent of the calves were born.

“The first objection we hear is that producers fear all calves will be born on the same day,” Patterson said. But not all pregnancies are the same length. In a herd of 100 cows, about 12 calves will be born on the peak calving day.

“That doesn’t strain most operations,” Patterson said. “In fact, most producers report they give more attention to grouped calves.”

A major advance in the heifer program was use of calving-ease genetics to cut death losses at birth. Losses are cut in both calves and heifers.

Calving ease and a uniform calf crop get a lot of attention, Patterson said. But a big advantage most often overlooked is higher-quality calves. With AI breeding, the best sires in a breed can

be used by any producer.

Timed AI allows herd owners to add value to what they are already producing, Patterson said. With AI breeding, it is possible to stack genetics. Both calving ease and growth genetics can be achieved, for example.

“We are making rapid strides in genetics,” he added. “It is time more producers overcome their reluctance to try new technology. Whether you are selling market steers or quality replacement heifers, protocols are available.”

Thompson Farm sales show the added value. The herd won first place the last two years in the Angus Source Carcass Challenge, topping all feedlots in the Central Region in the second quarter.

MU Thompson Farm sold 189 steers from fixed-time-AI cows that graded 31 percent USDA Prime and 96 percent Choice and Certified Angus Beef or better.

In comparison, the U.S. Prime grade average at all packing plants is 3 percent.

From the Thompson Farm herd, steers that were bred natural-service by cleanup bulls on cows that did not conceive from AI had a 15 percent rate of Prime grade.

“That shows the influence of the longtime genetic improvement in that cow herd,” Patterson said. Also, it shows another hidden benefit of fixed-time AI with high-accuracy sires.

“One research aim at Thompson Farm has been to produce premium quality for the white-tablecloth restaurants,” Patterson said. “That is where premium prices are paid for beef.

“Certified Angus Beef tells us there is a growing demand for high-quality beef. The question becomes, ‘Will Missouri beef producers respond and double the supply of Prime beef to meet that demand?’”

The two-day conference addressed all aspects, from breeding to marketing, of high-quality beef. The program is now called “The Missouri Recipe.”

Western producers can hear similar talks Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 in Boise, Idaho. The program and registration for the Northwest meeting is on the MU Conference Office website at <http://muconf.missouri.edu/arsbc-northwest/>.

Printed proceedings from the Joplin conference can be purchased for \$25. For information on ordering, send email to muconf6@missouri.edu. Δ



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