

Fall Breeding Season Reminder

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The fall breeding season will soon begin. Although many are still in the middle of harvest, it's important to take a few moments to decide what will be done.

One of the first decisions to be made is when to start the breeding season. This can be determined more readily by deciding when you want the cows to calve. For example, you may want to begin calving on September 1. Then, based on a 285-day gestation length, the cows should be bred on November 20. Remember that the length of gestation can vary by 10 days or more, especially for heifers. For heifers, initiate breeding 20 to 30 days before the start of the mature cow herd breeding season.

The next decision may be breeding season duration, which ultimately affects the calving season. Managing the cow herd to calve in 75 days is one of the most important steps toward increasing efficiency and profitability. Time and labor are important and expensive commodities for a cow-calf producer. A controlled calving season concentrates activities that save time and labor.

Ensure herd health is optimal. Many animal health problems can be controlled with good management, proper nutrition and vaccination against infectious diseases. Follow a program of disease prevention, test for diseases affecting reproduction and vaccinate the animals against such diseases. A good herd health program consists of an immunization program and an internal and external parasite control program.

Prior to the breeding season, perform an annual cow evaluation. At this time, look for the presence of "cancer eye," evaluate each cow's body condition score which should be between 5 and 6, check the feet and legs to assess lame-

ness or conformation problems, look at the udder for conformation and pendulous teats that make nursing difficult, assess the cow's disposition (flighty cows often produce calves with the same traits), and check the mouth of older cows, especially those that have a body condition score less than 5, for smooth mouth or broken mouth.

Management of your herd bull is just as important as the cow. Regardless of whether the bull is farm-raised or purchased, there are five general factors that can affect bull fertility: plane of nutrition, capability of the reproductive organs, quality of semen, libido, and structural soundness.

Ten to 25 percent of bulls have reduced fertility or possess physical problems, reducing their ability to sire calves. Structural soundness, including functional feet, legs and associated joints, is critical for the bull to effectively travel the breeding pasture and service females in heat. Capability of the reproductive organs and semen quality can be evaluated by conducting a breeding soundness exam (BSE) before the breeding season. A BSE consists of a physical exam (internal and external), measurement of scrotal circumference, and collection and evaluation of semen. However, most BSEs conducted do not evaluate the level of libido of the bull. Libido should be periodically evaluated throughout the breeding season by the manager. A bull should be observed during the breeding season to ensure cows are getting bred and that he does not become injured.

Management is the key to a successful operation. Breeding management is essential to maximize pregnancies and realize the optimum profit potential in cattle production. Many factors affect pregnancy rate, including cow and bull health, nutrition and previous reproductive history. △

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