

Fall Cow-Calf Management Considerations



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Well the weather has finally broken and many farmers are in the midst of harvesting. Nevertheless this is not a time to forget cows and calves. Sitting in the combine or grain truck may afford some time to plan upcoming management needs of the cow-calf herd.

As with any business, planning is essential for smooth operation and profitability. Planning requires knowledge of what will occur in the future (for example weaning). This knowledge in turn can then be used to develop a working calendar of events. This calendar can then serve as a gentle reminder when life becomes hectic with other responsibilities. We will consider fall management needs for spring calving herds.

In September, spring calving herd managers should determine what supplies and pharmaceuticals will be needed for the fall round-up and weaning. Remember to allow for time to order, process and delivery. Suggested supplies include ear tags to replace lost identification tags, deworming products, grub and lice products, and vaccines. Consult your herd veterinarian for vaccination and deworming programs that fits your needs.

Consider vaccinating calves approximately one month prior to weaning. Vaccinating calves while they are still on the cow will reduce stress. Unless spring calves are already on creep, begin to offer some grain in an area where they can begin learning to eat feed from a bunk. Also castrate and dehorn calves that were missed earlier.

Prepare your working facilities and, if available, to weigh your calf crop. For example re-

place weak posts and missing chute side walls. Properly working facilities accommodates safe working conditions for both people and cattle and provides the means to perform necessary cattle management practices. Begin to plan how you will market your calves.

In addition in September, consider checking the pregnancy status of heifers, sell all open heifers, wean calves off cows marked for culling, and determine when to market cull cows. Several options exist such as special feeder calf sales, private treaty, consignment sales, test stations, production sales, etc.

The month of October is generally fall round up and processing time for many herds. Processing includes weaning the calf crop, selecting replacement heifer calves, treating the entire herd for internal and external parasites, pregnancy testing and culling of open cows and culling any problem cows.

While cows are in the chute, asses and record the overall health of each cow and look for cancer eye, large teats, other health problems, and disposition. Once low producing, cull, and open cows are identified determine when to market these cows.

Remember that fall is a good time to take soil samples and topdress hay and pasture fields. Have winter feedstuffs analyzed for quality. Knowing hay quality is a critical factor in formulating economical supplementation programs.

Although these are only a tip of the iceberg when it comes to asking questions concerning each stage of management, they can serve as a guide to develop a calendar of events. This calendar in turn can be used as a gentle reminder to improve the productivity of their cow herds. Δ

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