

Improve Beef Reproduction With Exams Says Specialist

SPRINGFIELD, MO.

Cow-calf producers realize an important way to salvage a little profit out of their cows is to have them calve early, keep them calving on a regular basis and retain them in the herd a long time.

Reproduction is critical and longevity is vital to a successful cow-calf operation according to Eldon Cole, livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

“Attaining profitable reproduction rates and longevity begins with replacement heifer management before breeding even starts,” said Cole.

Producers should consider doing a pre-breeding exam which is a key part of the popular Missouri Show-Me-Select program. The pre-breeding exam is conducted by a veterinarian at least one month before the breeding season begins.

“The exam consists of evaluating the heifer’s reproductive tract to determine whether she’s reached puberty and is cycling or whether she’s immature and may not cycle during the next two or three months,” said Cole.

During the veterinarian’s palpation routine, the pelvic size is measured. The target for 12 to 17 month old heifers is 150 square centimeters.

“This can be important to expected calving difficulty, especially during the first calving,” said

Cole.

Pelvic size is an inherited trait and producers may discover some bulls in their herd could be siring heifers that are more likely to have difficult deliveries. Solid record keeping and good individual animal identification programs will aid in tracking sires and their daughters.

While the veterinarian examines the inside of the heifers, someone should visually examine the outside of them too. Cole says to check for growth (with a scale), closely observe the eyes, hooves, tails, temperament, udders, muscle pattern, hair coat and any other feature that could impact the production of the heifer over her lifetime.

“It’s wise to save more heifers than you think you’ll need at weaning. Herds that are on a maintenance program regarding cow herd size, will normally replace 15 to 20 percent of their cows each year with heifers,” said Cole.

During the pre-breeding check time, booster vaccinations and parasite control measures should be applied to help boost immunity of the young female that’s entering the herd.

MU Extension guide sheet G2041, “Management Considerations in Beef Heifer Development,” is available at the nearest MU Extension center or online at <http://extension.missouri.edu>. Δ