

# Improve Reproductive Efficiency To Increase Cow-Calf Profitability



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**T**o be profitable, beef cattle producers must strive for a high calf crop percent and heavy weaning weight, which ultimately means a cow must produce a calf every 12 months. But data from research and industry herds suggests that one out of every

four or five cows will fail to wean a calf each year. This failure results in a loss of 20 to 25 percent to the producer each year.

To avoid such losses and remain profitable in the competitive world of beef cattle production, the top goal for any cow-calf operation should be to achieve optimal levels of reproductive performance, and subsequently, high levels of reproductive efficiency.

Reproductive efficiency is multifaceted and requires developing a cattle management plan that includes production, reproduction, nutrition, herd health, feed, forages, etc.

To achieve high levels of reproductive efficiency, several management recommendations can be made.

- Adopt a controlled breeding season to improve and/or reduce management and labor costs. A study conducted by Parker revealed that for each day the breeding season was lengthened, the annual cost of producing a hundred pounds of weaned calf increased by 4.7 cents and pounds of calf weaned per cow per year decreased by 0.158 pounds.

- Incorporate pregnancy determination (detection of estrus, rectal palpation, transrectal ultrasonography, or blood sampling) into your herd management plan. Pregnancy determination will improve the reproductive efficiency of any cow herd by retaining those cows and heifers that were bred only during the breeding season and culling all open cows and heifers.

- Review cow-herd records and cull open, defective, low-producing cows and especially older

cows. The additional cost of carrying over open cows and/or heifers until the next breeding season is at least \$550.

- Develop a herd health management plan with your veterinarian to minimize disease risk and reduce parasitism.

- Consider sorting cows into groups based on nutritional needs to improve or reduce management and feed costs. Also separating cows and heifers will ensure that the heifers have a better opportunity to meet their nutritional needs as well as that of the developing fetus.

In addition to the above recommendations for achieving high levels of reproductive efficiency the following can also improve cow-calf herd profitability.

- Keep only the essential number of replacement animals to achieve the desired herd inventory.

- Consider the economics of buying versus raising replacement animals. Developing replacement animals is expensive.

- Try to keep cows productive over a longer time period.

- Perform preventive herd-health practices to reduce “emergency” costs and losses.

- Reduce cow frame size over time if needed to lower total feed requirements.

- Compare prices of herd-health animal products.

- Use caution when selecting inputs to increase weaning percent or weights during years of low beef-market prices. The expense of some inputs will exceed the income their use will generate.

Low reproduction is one of the greatest inefficiencies facing cow-calf operators which greatly impacts profitability due to reduced weaned pounds. Although numerous factors influence achieving a high calving percentage, developing a herd management strategy will improve your chances of producing heavy weaning calves and achieving profitability. △

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