

Looking At Your Cattle A Practice For Beef Production Success Says Extension Specialist

MT. VERNON, MO. Successful beef cattle producers in south-west Missouri give varied responses when asked about their most important practices for success.

According to Eldon Cole, a livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension, most producers will stay things like forage production, genetic selection, health programs and effective marketing.

“One couple I talked with surprised me a bit when the wife quickly replied, ‘we look at them a lot.’ Looking at your cattle is a management practice some may not take too seriously but I have admit, it is an important part of beef cattle production,” said Cole.

Other farm chores or off-the-farm job demands may be reasons this practice is not performed as frequently or as competently as it should be.

“Cattle and their environment do need to be looked at frequently and with a purpose,” said Cole. “A quick check after dark or before the sun comes up is not good enough, but may be the best you can do.”

During the “looking,” Cole suggests producers count the cattle if possible, to tell if someone might have borrowed or stolen some.

“Law enforcement folks need to know soon if you’re missing cattle. If you only do a count every two weeks, the chances of finding a thief are slim. A daily check is ideal,” said Cole.

A close herd check should be routine during calving season according to Cole.

“This is the one time during the year most cow herd owners do check to tag calves, make sure heifers or cows do not need assistance and no scour or other sickness problems have begun,” said Cole.

During the breeding season, close attention should be given to the bull to determine if he is healthy and doing his job. Close observers may even keep dates and numbers down on females that were in heat.

Grazing schools teach close observation of pasture growth too. It is especially important to look at the forage as far as quality and quantity are concerned.

“If you’re following a fairly rigid rotational grazing system, an excellent time to look and count is when you change pastures. Weed problems can be noted, some of which may be toxic,” said Cole.

In fescue country, in the late fall-early winter,

special attention should be given on cold mornings to symptoms of fescue foot. It results in lameness in the rear feet. According to Cole, keen observation can pick it up before significant damage occurs to the animal.

Pasture checks may be done by walking, riding horseback, on a four-wheeler or in a truck. The important thing is to “look a lot,” make notes about what is going on with your investment.

“University of Missouri Extension budgets allocate five hours per cow per year for labor. A portion of that time is for looking and management. That time helps improve the bottom line in the beef cow enterprise,” said Cole. Δ



Changing pastures gives this cattlegirl a chance to gentle her herd and count the numbers in the pasture.



A cattlemen checks both the heifers and the pasture conditions.



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