

New Research Casts Practice Of Breeding Cattle For Fall Calving In A Different Light

MT. VERNON, MO.

For a number of years, the trend in southwest Missouri has been toward fall calving. The practice been prompted, to some extent, by the inability to breed cows and heifers for spring calves on endophyte infected fescue.

“The females, no doubt, were affected by high temperatures and if they bred they might not stay bred. Research now indicates the problem may even have been influenced by the bull’s lowered conception rates in hot weather,” said Eldon Cole, a livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

Cole says many cattle producers found that as the temperatures lowered in the fall the females would breed and stay bred. As a result, it almost became a common recommendation across the area to turn the bulls in or artificially breed cows right around Thanksgiving.

This practice resulted in a lot of early September calves. However, more recently, those early September calves have been coming in August. Why does this happen? According to Cole, calving ease bulls may have had an influence since they often have a shorter gestation length.

“Some have found pushing bull turnout into early November gave their calves a bit more age and weight in the spring when feeder cattle market prices usually peak in April. Some folks still breed the cows for September 1 calves, but expose heifers a few weeks earlier,” said Cole.

Another factor could be related to hot fescue and elevated ambient temperatures. Cole says since we have had an unusually hot summer and are in late July, producers with heifers or cows due to calve in the next month should watch them closely and expect those calves to arrive early.

“In fact, they may need as much attention as winter-calving females. The only difference is you’re combating heat, flies and sometimes females that don’t produce much milk instead of cold and snow,” said Cole.

Cattle in other areas of the country, like South Carolina, are bred to calve in November or December. Of course, the weather and forages in those states are different.

“Mid-August calves in normal years may be fine, but keep a close watch on them as they do tend to come early especially,” said Cole. Δ