

News Column for Use Week of 04/08/2019
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River Valley Extension District
04/04/2019

Shorter Breeding Season Means Higher Profits

Shortening the breeding season of a beef herd sounds like win to me – a win for cattle producers. However, making the switch can be a tough decision. Change can be difficult for anyone. This is my attempt to persuade cow-calf producers to make a change, if they haven't already done so.

Reproduction is easily the most important factor for any cow-calf producer. Ideally, a herd will be 90% or greater. However, if a 90% pregnancy rate is spread out over 90 days or greater, then this could be sacrificing money when the calves are sold. The reason for this is the average size of calves is less when the breeding season is spread out (older calves are bigger). So, if more cows could get bred earlier in the breeding season, a herd will be more profitable overall.

How can this be done? There are many great products on the market that can be utilized to breed cattle and they are not just for artificial insemination. One simple practice that has been shown to be effective is to give a shot of prostaglandin five days after turning the bulls out. This should get all cows that are cycling to come into heat within ten days. The cows that are already in heat should get bred in the first five days. Sometimes this is not practical, because the cows are not close to a handling facility. Instead, a shot on the same day the bulls are turned out is another option but, it's not as effective. However, prostaglandin will have no effect on cows that are not cycling.

For cows that are not cycling, because they were late calving, there are other options. Prostaglandin will have no effect on cows that are not cycling, because there is no corpus luteum (CL) to lyse, which is the role prostaglandin plays. Instead, these cows will need a gonadotropin releasing hormone (GnRH) injection. GnRH will stimulate the release of luteinizing hormone (LH) and Follicle stimulating hormone (FSH). These two hormones control the growth and regulation of follicles on the ovaries which release the egg.

The purpose of going through this is to tighten up the calving window and to get as many calves born earlier in the calving season as possible. This can increase the average age of calves by 10-17 days and the average weaning weight 20-44 pounds. Depending on the price of cattle, that can be an extra \$30-\$80/ head on sale day. Depending on the quantity and the place you buy your supplies, these injections will be about \$2-\$4/animal. I'd say that would be a good return on your investment

Changing your operation doesn't have to be a dramatic. These are some simple, proven methods to improve the breeding season, and in turn the calving season. For more information call Brett Melton in the Concordia River Valley Extension Office at 785-243-8185 or email bmelton@ksu.edu.