Culling Priorities at Preg Checking

On a recent Cattle Chat podcast hosted by several experts at the Kansas State University’s Beef Cattle Institute. They discussed culling priorities and what that means for your operation.

In a year of a drought or several years of drought culling cows in a herd becomes a must to maintain the operation. There are times in life when tough decisions must be made, and in the beef business that can come when feed resources are limited or a time of generational transition. Cows that are not bred are often the first ones to leave the ranch when making a culling decision. It’s much more profitable to cash her in and replace with one that will calve next year. Make this sort off the end of the chute at pregnancy check time. But after that group has been eliminated, there are several factors that guide which group of cattle will be cut from the herd next.

Some of these include the average age of the herd, pregnancy timing, long-term feed resource availability and market conditions, according to the experts. The first thing you want to know in making a culling decision is if it is just for this year or if it is a situation where there is going to be a reduction in the herd size over multiple years. An example is “If I am planning to get out of the cattle business over the next several years versus having a plan to build back my herd size after the drought, there are very different strategies to achieve this.

Often these decisions are more complex than a yes or no answer regarding a specific group within the herd. The first ones to be sold might be a young heifer or a bred first-calf heifer that was bred late in the breeding season because she doesn’t fit with the calving season very well and the market potential right now is good.

Sometimes the decisions depend on the average age of the herd. If it is an older herd, you don’t want to make the average age even greater by selling off the young females. The performance of the calves the cows raise might also influence the culling decision, agreed the experts.

Cattle producers don’t cull a cow on her calf performance alone but in a year when reducing, the herd is a must. Moving a cow higher on the sell list might just happen if she raises a lower-performing calf. The other important factor to consider when culling cows is the temperament of the animal. If she has an attitude, she is the first to go down the road.

Culling parameters should remove cattle that do not help the farm or ranch meet its goals. A good question to ask before developing a culling plan is: “What are my goals, and what culling criteria will help my operation and cattle achieve them?” Every operation has different goals.

To hear the full discussion, listen to the Cattle Chat podcast online or through your preferred streaming platform. If you have any questions, please contact Kaitlyn Hildebrand in the Concordia office at 785-243-8185 or at khildebrand@ksu.edu.

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