

Things to Consider for the Breeding Season

Timothy W. Wilson
Extension Animal Scientist – Beef Cattle

This time of year most producers are either finishing up their calving season or have already begun breeding cattle that calved in the fall. There are many things that should be considered when beginning a breeding season. Breeding season length, body condition (nutrition), reproductive tract problems and reproductive diseases are just a few of the many things that can have a dramatic effect on the reproductive performance of the beef cow.

Defining a breeding season is as easy as deciding when to place a bull into a herd and when to pull him out. Research has shown that breeding seasons that are defined can increase overall profits by decreasing labor, culling open females and facilitating management (Sprott and Beverly, TAMU). Utilizing a defined breeding season results in a defined calving season that can help to reach uniformity in weaning weights ultimately leading to more pounds of calf weaned per cow.

Body condition scoring is a simple management tool that can be implemented easily. Poor nutrition has a dramatic affect on the ability of a female to cycle and conceive. Research from the Kunkle et al., (University of Florida) demonstrated that a body condition score (scale of 1 – 9; 1 = thin, 9 = obese; 5 – 6 optimum for breeding) of ≥ 5 regardless of parity yielded pregnancy rates in the 80 – 90% range. A decrease in body condition score from a 5 to a 4 then from a 4 to a 3 can result in a 30% reduction in pregnancy for each score less than 5. Cows and heifers should be managed separately to ensure the nutritional plan of each group is met.

Reproductive tract problems in the female such as cystic follicles are easily treated when recognized and treated properly. Cystic follicles are cysts that form on the ovary when the follicle fails to ovulate. This cyst can be palpated on the ovary via rectal palpation. Cystic follicles secrete estrogen continuously causing the female to show signs of estrus; these females may be referred to as "bullers" (Ensminger and Perry, 1997). A female who is in heat that shows signs of heat 3-5 days later should indicate the possibility of a cyst. Your local veterinarian can resolve this problem by injecting a single dose of Gonadotropin Releasing Hormone (GnRH).

Each year within a herd the occurrence of retained placenta in beef cattle is around 5%. Females that deliver calves prematurely or later than normally expected have an increased incidence of retained placenta. This generally results in reduced fertility of approximately 5 – 10%. It is important to note that if a cow has a retained placenta, it should not be removed by pulling it out, but

rather allowed to expel itself. Generally afterbirth will fall out within a 1 to 2 week period. The placenta should be cut off at the hocks to protect against the female stepping on the afterbirth and causing trauma to the uterus (Ensminger and Perry, 1997).

Reproductive diseases can play a major role in the reproductive process. Vibriosis, Leptospirosis, Trichomoniasis and BVD are just a few of the diseases that can result in reduced reproductive efficiency. Consulting with your local veterinarian regarding common vaccination protocols in your specific area can be helpful in protecting against these diseases.

There are many factors involved in the reproductive process. Understanding and preparing for scenarios related to the breeding process can help increase overall conception rates leading to maximized profit dollars. If you have any questions regarding this topic, feel free to contact your local county agent or call me at (912) 681- 5639.

Sources:

Sprott, L.R., and J.R. Beverly. Long Calving Season: Problems and Solutions.

Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Texas A&M University. B-1443.

Kunkle, W.E., R.S. Sand, D.O. Rae. Effect of cow age and condition on nutrient requirements and management. The University of Florida.

Ensminger, M.E., R.C. Perry. 1997. Beef Cattle Science. 7th ed. pp 246-247.

Interstate Publishers, Inc. Danville, Illinois.