

Hardee Rancher Beef and Forage Newsletter



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February - March 1999

UP COMING EVENTS

March 1999		
2	Ag Fest	Farm Bureau - Cattlemen's Arena
20	Hardee County Fair Swine Weigh-In	Cattlemen's Arena
21	Hardee County Fair Steer Weigh-In	Cattlemen's Arena
23	Hardee County Fair Swine Show 7:00 pm	Cattlemen's Arena
24	Hardee County Fair Steer Show 7:00 pm	Cattlemen's Arena

25	Hardee County Fair Livestock Sale 7:00 pm	Cattlemen's Arena
April 1999		
6, 8, 13 & 15	Beef Cattle Management Short Course	Wauchula Hardee County Extension
29	Producing Calves That Stay Healthy	Hardee Livestock Market
May 1999		
5-7	Beef Cattle Short Course	Gainesville
11-13	Reproduction Management School	Wauchula
June 1999		
8-10	Forage & Pasture Management School: Session I	Sebring
16-18	FCA Annual Convention & Trade Show	Marco Island
July 1999		
13-15	Forage & Pasture Management School: Session II	Sebring
20	Beef Cattle Health Management Program	Wauchula Hardee Agri-Civic Center
August 1999		
10-12	Forage & Pasture Management School: Session III	Sebring

So You've Turned Your Bulls In.. Now What?

Most South Florida ranchers have recently begun their breeding seasons by turning in all or a portion of their bull battery with their cows. Many ranchers do this in December or January and leave the bulls with the cows for anywhere between 75-200 plus days. Now we all know that no two ranchers think exactly alike! Each has different cattle on different land with different budgets and even different goals. But there is one thing they all have in common. Each rancher wants every cow exposed to the bull to not only achieve and maintain a pregnancy but to raise a strapping big calf to weaning age. If we can all agree on this single objective then let us examine a few of the factors which will affect the pregnancy rate. Notice I said **pregnancy rate**. Because if the cow fails to become pregnant, it is impossible for her to earn her keep. So let us confine our attention in

this article to **Managing the Bull During the Breeding Season**. The following are suggestions you may wish to consider to increase the pregnancy rate in your cowherd:

1. Physically inspect every bull exposed to cows at least once per week. Watch the way he travels. Is he free in his stride or is he stilted in his gait? Pay close attention to his feet and legs, eyes and general body condition. He should have been in a Body Condition Score (BCS) of 6 or higher when he was turned in with the cows. BCS's range from 1-9 (emaciated to very fat). It is natural for him to lose from 10-20% of his weight during the breeding season. He can do this and still remain fertile and sexually aggressive but the weight loss should be gradual and not sudden. Younger bulls, bulls in larger pastures, and those with more cows to cover will lose weight more quickly. Now it becomes readily apparent why it is so important to purchase bulls closer to home and raised under environmental conditions similar to those on your ranch. I realize that there are excellent bulls raised out of state but recognize that when you purchase a bull in Montana with a frame score much larger than what it fits this south Florida environment, you may have asked this imported bull to perform on groceries which cannot support him. If you have purchased a bull from some distance, hopefully he has been given at least sixty days acclimation on your ranch prior to the breeding season.
2. Observe the bull serving the cow. Does the bull show any inhibition or disinclination to complete the job? Have you actually seen him thrust into and dismount from the cow without showing any signs of discomfort? Bulls with Brahman breeding are often "shy breeders" and can be more easily observed breeding from a distance with binoculars. Many such bulls will only breed at night. Record the cow's number and the breeding date in your pocket calendar and check that cow closely for any signs of return heat 18-23 days later. If the percentage of cows returning to heat is high, remove the bull and check for injury or semen quality factors. Replace the questionable bull with a fresh bull. In a multi-sire breeding system, the infertile or sterile bull often goes unnoticed because another bull will get the cow bred.
3. Do not mix bulls or unequal rank. Older bulls are usually more dominant and often have lowered fertility. Dominance and sex drive are not related, and neither is dominance and fertility. In multi-sire groups, pregnancy rates can be reduced when the dominant bull is infertile. Use homogenous groups of younger bulls. In an ideal world, all breeding herds would be single-sire. Ideal because sire identity as well as fertility would be known. However, we don't live in an ideal world and cattle can be more economically gathered and worked in larger, multi-sire groups.
4. Sexual activity and bull fertility can be increased by rotating bulls in and out of the cow herd. Yes, this practice does require extra labor but my own experience has proven to me that the best pregnancy rates have been achieved when I was most diligent at rotating bulls. Here's how it can work. Approximately two-thirds of all heats will occur in the first one-third of the breeding season. So turn in two-thirds of the bulls at the beginning of the season and rest the other one-third. The resting group can regain body condition by eating a conditioning ration and healing bruised body parts. Have you ever noticed a group of bulls hanging around together and asked yourself why they weren't mixing with the cows? This phenomenon is noticed most frequently in mid to late season. It doesn't mean they have all the cows bred. It can signal that they are resting/repairing. Why not do it "back at the house" where you can slip them a few extra groceries? These apparently idle bulls may also be breeding at night which is very common among Brahman and Brahman influenced cattle. If you do utilize a bull rotation, consider using the better bulls first when more of the cows will be cycling. The major disadvantage to rotating bulls is the obvious additional labor required. Many ranchers are reluctant to rotate bulls fearing they will fight when reintroduced. Personally, I have not found this to be a problem when the bulls have either been raised together or run together during the non-breeding season. How long you rest the bulls depends upon the length of the breeding season. In a 90-120 day breeding season, rotating every two and one-half weeks works well. I've seen ranchers become angry at the suggestion of rotating bulls during the breeding season because after all, the bull is only working for part of the year anyway! The reason bull rotation works is because the introduction of fresh bulls increases the sexual

excitation level of the cow herd and the bulls remain competitive. Regarding the length of the breeding season, remember that it is not possible to get a calf from every cow every 365 days if the breeding season extends beyond 82 days (365 minus 283 = 82).

5. **Bull: Cow Ratio** How many cows can my bull settle? That's an age old question with no easy answer, but here are a few sound guidelines. Young bulls developed on high forage diets in large pastures with other bulls generally grow into more satisfactory breeders. Breeding beef bulls should weigh approximately 1,000 lbs. and have reached 15 months of age before turning out. Don't place any bull with a group of cows without first having an experienced veterinarian perform a semen evaluation at the very least. A breeding soundness exam and a libido test will help to identify sub-fertile bulls. Three to four bulls per hundred cows will work well under most situations. For yearling bulls in a first experience situation, 15-20 cows is about the limit. In conclusion, the most constant thing about cattle is their variation. There is a world of difference among bulls. Expect much. Demand much. Beef the losers.

Herd Management Considerations

Today, there are many opportunities to improve herd performance. These include nutrition, genetics, pasture management, health and records. One opportunity often overlooked is product uniformity. Cattle need uniformity to market well, perform in the feedlot and produce the carcass quality consumers demand. The breeding program should be designed to accomplish two things: 1) develop optimum cows that work on the ranch and 2) produce calves that will perform in the feedlot. Poor quality cattle, i.e., the light muscled, small boned cattle; too small or too large framed cattle; yield grade 4 and 5 cattle are profit robbers to all phases of the cattle industry. Many of these undesirable characteristics can be recognized by evaluating individual cows. Those that deviate from the herd quality standard should be culled as they reflect on the ranch herd quality and the calf crop's final sale price. The cow herd or cow groups need to be uniform in breeding, size, conformation and color.

To Improve Herd Uniformity:

- Shorten the breeding season to 90 days or less. In large herds, group cows according to calving season. The closer they are in age, the more uniform they will be throughout all growth phases. An important economic benefit of this practice is a lower supplement cost because the nutrition program can be fine-tuned to the herd's reproductive needs and forage quality.
- Select heifers from early calving cows. Research has shown that these heifers also breed early themselves. Cull or group all late calving cows. Their calves will be 50 to 75 lbs. lighter throughout the growing and finishing periods than those born early in the calving season. A wide weight range at sale time detracts from uniformity regardless of quality.
- Select for a uniform color and conformation in the calf crop. This can be very important economically because multi-colored groups of even high quality calves are viewed by many in the cattle industry as non-uniform.
- Group cows by breed and then use bulls that all have the same genetic background; ideally from the same seedstock supplier. This makes for a uniform-looking group of calves, an important marketing consideration. It is also important for selecting replacement heifers. If using a terminal cross, do not save any of the heifers as replacements as they may not fit ranch resources as mature cows.

- Keep groups or herds in 150 to 200 head size range if the total ranch cow numbers permit. This allows for the selection of uniform calves to market in truckload lots at the time of delivery to the buyers.
- Gather all possible information about performance and carcass merit. This includes entering a representative sample of calves in an evaluation program which will provide live performance and carcass data. This important data will help in marketing the calf crop as well as show the breeding program's merits and deficiencies.

The cattle industry needs high quality, uniform calves that perform well in the feedlot and finish into tender, tasty, thin rinded, and well marbled cuts for the final buyer, our consumers. To profit, the rancher needs high quality and uniform calves. It doesn't cost any more to produce a high quality calf than an inferior calf; but the pride and profit is much higher.

Source: The Supplement, '99 Winter Issue
Lakeland Cash Feed

Where's The Beef? In Marianna

In August, the University of Florida started breaking ground in Marianna, Florida for the new beef unit to be located at the North Florida Research and Education Center (NFREC). This beef unit will include the state's only bull test program, in addition to emphasis on forage production, cattle management, beef cattle nutrition, and genetic research. The concept behind the bull test station is to be able to produce cattle that will perform in a hot, humid climate and on poor pastures. There are people in South America that are ready to buy bulls that are climatized and tested in Florida's environment.

Source: "Newsline" Fall 1998
Volume 4 Issue 2

The Bottom 10 to 15%

With the late fall and early winter season here, now is the time to evaluate the cow herd's body condition. When looking at body condition, don't look at the fat cows; instead, look at the bottom 10 to 15%. These are the cows that will either not cycle or cycle late the next calving season. They may need to be separated and offered special supplementation or the best forage as a means of improving their Body Condition Score (BCS) before calving. The minimal BCS is 5 at calving if desirable reproductive performance is to be expected. A cow must cycle and rebreed within 83 days after calving if she is to maintain a 365-day calving interval. Many research studies have shown that only about 60% of the thin cows will cycle at 90 days after calving as opposed to about 90% of the BCS 5 and higher cows. This 10 to 15% can have tremendous effect on profits. A strung-out calf crop due to late calving cows is more expensive than open cows. If an early calving cow calves in the first 10 days of the calving season, and the other calves 90 days into the calving season, there will be an 80-day calf age difference at weaning. If the calves each gain 2 pounds per day from birth to weaning, this will still be a 160 pound weight spread at the same weaning date. This age difference also detracts from calf crop uniformity which will reduce sale price. This makes a strong case for culling chronically late calvers and replacing them with early calving heifers. With the declining forage quality and the cows in their last trimester of pregnancy, body condition needs to be monitored closely to insure early

rebreeding and a reduction of late calves.

Source: The Supplement, '99 Winter Issue
Lakeland Cash Feed

Forage Test Kits Available Why Test Your Forage?

Forage testing provides useful information about the nutritive value of a forage. This information can be used to adjust the amount of protein and energy supplements that are fed with the forage in order to meet the needs of the animals being fed. **This information can SAVE you money.**

The Extension Forage Testing Program uses near infrared reflectance spectroscopy (NIRS) to analyze the forages. This is a faster method than those that have been used in the past. Results can usually be returned in 7 to 10 days.

How To Get Started. Forage test kits can be obtained from the Hardee County Extension office. These kits contain complete instructions on how to collect and submit a sample for analysis. The kit contains a mailing envelope with the laboratory address label, a plastic bag to hold the sample, and a sample information report form. A sample with completed form and payment (check) are sent to the NIRS laboratory at the Range Cattle Research and Education Center, Ona, FL. The cost is \$8.00.

What Forage Can Be Tested? Hay, silage and or pasture. If you have never tested your forage, call Lockie Gary at 773-2164 and ask about how to take your samples. Your results are only as good as your sample. I will be happy to assist you with the sampling and the interpretation of the results. **KNOW WHAT YOUR CATTLE ARE EATING!**

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For questions or comments regarding this publication contact



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