

Hardee Rancher Beef and Forage Newsletter



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October/November 1999

UP COMING EVENTS

September 1999	
16	Beef Cattle Winter Supplementation Seminar - Sarasota
25	Florida Santa Gertrudis Assoc. Cattleman's Kind Auction - Bartow
October 1999	
1	Florida Cattlemen's Association Heifer Sale - 1:00 P.M. Hardee Livestock Market - Wauchula
4	Brangus Bull Sale - Arcadia Livestock Market
14	Herd Bull Selection Program - Hardee Cattlemen's Arena - Wauchula
18	Running M Ranch/GDQQ Ranch - Braford Bull Sale - Arcadia Livestock

19-21	Sunbelt Agricultural Exposition - Moultrie, GA
28	Hay Production Field Day - Palmetto
29	Graham Angus Bull Sale - Okeechobee Livestock Market

Why Cows Fail To Become Pregnant

Cows fail to breed for many reasons. Nutritional inadequacy probably leads the list followed by poor genetics, disease, anatomical/physiological disorders, poor semen quality/quantity, etc. But did you ever consider that many bulls actually choose not to breed cows in heat!

It has been estimated that as many as two out of every five bulls are subfertile. Many of these bulls you will never identify because they are not stressed during the breeding season. Stress-free refers to bulls who have only a handful of cows to breed or those who can bluff their way behind an aggressive bull battery in the same pasture with them. Many bulls who have excellent semen quality and pass a BSE (Breeding Soundness Examination) with flying colors have low libido or low sex drive and have no interest in females in heat. You could be purchasing one of these bulls at a sale this fall and not discover the problem until it's too late. In most cases, beef bulls do not receive any form of assessment prior to sale or use for libido or serving capacity. Find out how to reduce your risks of purchasing a dud bull and how to maximize your opportunity to purchase a high performing bull that will make you money for years to come by attending the Herd Bull Selection Program at The Hardee Cattlemen's Arena on Thursday, October 14, 1999, from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. followed by dinner. See the enclosed brochure for details and don't forget to call the extension office by October 6th to reserve a space for your free dinner. We are looking forward to your attendance and participation.

Are Your Cows Stressed?

Cattle are like people in that they undergo many stresses in their brief lives. Some of these stresses are brought about by their owners or managers who do not realize the stress they are causing. Let's look at a few of the common problems and mistakes we all sometimes make when "working cattle".

Whenever you are working cattle in extremely hot weather it is always best to work them at first light when the temperature is cooler. Do not pen more cattle than you can work in a reasonable amount of time. Get the cattle out of the pens as early in the day as possible. And remember, the fastest way to work cattle is slowly!

Cattle will balk and may refuse to pass through a facility if they see distractions such as shadows. If cattle absolutely refuse to move through an alley or chute, there may be a very simply solution. Once the area is cleared of cattle traffic, get down in the alley at eyeball level with a cow and look for common distractions such as:

- Reflections on puddles
- Reflections on smooth metal
- Chains that jiggle
- Metal clanging or banging
- High pitched noise
- Air hissing - should be silenced with mufflers or piped outside

- Air drafts blowing towards approaching animals
- Clothing hung on the fence
- Piece of plastic that is moving
- Fan blade movement
- Seeing people moving up ahead
- Small object on the floor - such as a coffee cup
- Changes in flooring and texture
- Drain grate on the floor
- Sudden changes in the color of equipment. Colors with high contrast are the worst
- Alley entrance is too dark. Animals will move from a darker place to a brighter place
- Bright light such as blinding sun. Animals will move from a darker place to a brighter place, but they will not move toward blinding light
- Animals may balk at one-way and back-up gates. Install them two to three body lengths away from the crowd pen. Equip one-way gates with a remote controlled rope so that they can be held open when the single file alley is filled

Any one of the items on this list may cause animals to stop moving and prevent a properly designed facility from working efficiently.

Source: Adapted from Dr. Temple Grandin's Web Page

Culling Beef Cows

Cattle managers need to evaluate the performance of their cows at least once per year. Perhaps the best time to do this is at weaning because her calf, if she weaned a calf, is in the cowpen with her. Culling cattle has always been a very pleasurable experience for me because it is the one time of the year when I am afforded the opportunity to shape up the herd and rid it of cows which fail to meet my standards.

All a cow has to do in life is to produce a reasonably good calf each year. It's that simple. If she fails to comply with this one requirement she should be culled. This single obligation of the cow dictates that we need to eliminate from the cowherd all cows that:

- do not conceive
- conceive, but do not calve
- calve, but do not raise the calf
- produce a poor quality calf

Why is this so difficult to put into practice?

This strict no-nonsense approach to culling cannot be implemented unless pregnancy rates are at least 85% and weaning rates are at least 70%. Otherwise, there are insufficient numbers of replacement heifers available to maintain herd size. If conception rates are below 85%, culling cows for any reason other than being able to produce a live calf at birth is a luxury that cannot be afforded without reducing the size of the herd.

Have you ever noticed how some producers are always attempting to increase the size of their herd? The reason for this is a pregnancy rate less than 85%. Don't miss this point. If you will cull every cow that fails to

wean a respectable calf every year, you may eliminate a few decent cows but you'll rid your herd of all the losers. Putting this principle into practice will drive up pregnancy rates immediately and eventually will cause the herd to calve earlier in the season resulting in heavier weaning weights and earlier puberty in heifers.

The average Florida rancher spends in excess of \$300/year to maintain a cow. Who wants to keep in the herd a cow which yields nothing in return for your hard earned investment? You wouldn't put up with an employee who performed like this!

- In summary, cows should be culled for the following reasons:
- Failure to become pregnant
- Failure to produce a live calf
- Cull older cows before they lose their teeth and while still in good body condition.
- If you can still afford to cull more cows, focus on eliminating those which wean a light calf (one which weighs less than 50% of the cow's body weight). Note: Smaller cows tend to be more efficient in this regard.

Keep in mind that it is a luxury to cull a cow that produces a small calf. A cow which weans any size calf is far better than one which produces nothing.

So get on that parting gate, enjoy yourself, and be as ruthless as you can afford to be. You'll be glad you did.

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For questions or comments regarding this publication contact



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