



Is There Just One Factor Affecting Your Breed Up? Things to Think Of!

Reproduction in the beef industry can arguably be considered our most economically important trait that sustains our industry. Many questions arise about reproduction and how to manage it. From an industry standpoint, we should ask ourselves if reproduction should be maximized or optimized? These basic questions describe an all-encompassing set of circumstances that dictate success or failure of a reproductive program.

When a cow-calf producer experiences a less than desirable breed up, there are many factors that come into play. It is important to recognize a set of guidelines that you've set for yourself or be able to establish a set of questions to begin asking when reproductive results don't meet your goals. So where do you start dissecting the "problem?" Information needs to be broken down into three basic areas: 1) historical information; 2) managerial information; 3) biological information. Are all these the same? Admittedly there are overlapping gray areas among these categories.

Historical Information: Historical information should include past breed ups in the same/similar set of cows in the same/similar pastures with the same/similar genetic program. The calculations also need to be figured the same. The numbers need to be figured on a percentage basis of cows confirmed pregnant as to cows exposed to breeding stock (natural breeding or artificial insemination or both depending on the calculations you are running). Just figuring the number of cows confirmed pregnant as to the number of cows going through pregnancy check doesn't completely describe the whole environment. However, make sure that the calculations are being compared to

like numbers. Understand and compare who did the preg check work and how they did it (manual palpation or ultrasound). Understand and compare when the preg check was performed (calendar day, time of day) and where the preg check was performed as different facilities can offer different physical challenges for the animal, as well as the technician.

Managerial Information: Managerial information should include a whole myriad of data. This information should start at the time of calving prior to the breeding season in question for cows and prior to breeding for heifers. It's important to know and understand how the calving season went. Management records should include the occurrence and severity of dystocia, as well as how long and to what extent were fetal membranes retained and what treatments were implemented. Body Condition Score (BCS) records, pasture movements, and feeding records should all be pulled and evaluated. In addition, all health management records should be pulled and evaluated. They should include but are not limited to: vaccinations, parasite control, medications, hormonal programs, breeding soundness examinations, and trichomoniasis testing results.

In addition to animal management, understanding the animal and environmental interactions can play a role as well. Allowing animals to breed at ideal environmental times can help with energy flush and bull coverage. Further, if environmental conditions such as heat, cold, ice, wind, etc. tend to move livestock into undesirable areas for breeding, this needs to be scrutinized. Topographical conditions such as distance to water, total area of

useable pasture, and degree of slope may also be a noteworthy set of factors to evaluate. So is a summary of animal records such as age, breeding dates, sire or dam info if you are using artificial insemination or embryo transfer. When using artificial insemination and embryo transfer, it is also important to note environmental and facility conditions, as well as tech names when breeding. The number of bulls, when, where, and how the bulls were turned out, how long the bulls were out, and which bulls were turned out with a given set of females should be noted. It should also be noted who the herdsman and/or caretakers are of the set of cows in question.

Biological Information: Difficult births, cesarean sections, retained placentas, and slow uterine involution can all prolong anestrus physically and hormonally and should be recorded. It is important to note these things at calving.

Understanding BCS at calving not only helps evaluate where the animals are at that point but also guides the quantity and quality of nutrition needed to be delivered before and during the breeding season. Energy, protein, minerals, and vitamins are all critically important and should be managed continuously. Remember, when evaluating your nutrition program, animals don't eat concentrations – they eat quantities. Delivery and intake are just as important. Don't forget to provide good quantity and quality of water at all times.

When dealing with the first calf heifer (our most critical investment not only financially but also genetically speaking), she needs to be developed

and maintained at a desirable rate of growth and gain to make sure she breeds back as a three year old. This includes the time period after having her first calf up until breeding and through calving the second time. Understand her possible exposure to hormonal growth promotants.

Bull management 90-120 days prior to breeding is just as critical as the cows. Body condition, overall health management (including feet), breeding soundness exams, trichomoniasis testing, and mineral nutrition are all important items to consider when making sure your bull battery is ready to go to work. Evaluate and adjust bull:cow ratios as needed to meet your environmental demands, as well as your herd demands. Remember, good fences make good neighbors, especially at breeding time.

It is strongly suggested that you develop a vaccination program with your herd veterinarian that fits the needs of your animals and the logistics of your operation. Remember, every trip to the chute is a stress to your animals. It's advisable that you understand the potential interaction with wildlife and what they could carry, spread, and infect your breeding stock with.

Strategically plan the exposure or prevent the exposure of your animals to plant life that could contain high levels of naturally-occurring hormones (phytoestrogens or plant life that is or could be potentially toxic to the dam or the fetus).

For further information or questions, please contact your Vigortone representative.