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BeefTalk: Why Is It We Always Talk About the Bull Last?

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NDSU Extension Service

The 2009 calf crop is not arriving as quickly as expected. This has not been all bad because the cold weather was not conducive for calving.

Yet, if one wants to start calving March 1, then one needs to start on March or April 1 or whenever the desired date is. Typically, almost two-thirds of the calf crop should be born within three weeks of the starting date.

This is a benchmark value for members of the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association. Members accomplish their goal and will be about 90 percent done with calving within six weeks of the start.

In reality, a productive herd will have several cows calving before the due date and calving should quickly build for three weeks and then quickly but gradually let up. Creating such a herd is not an easy task and some understanding of basic cattle reproduction is helpful.

Typically, a cow's estrous cycle runs every 21 days, so one can expect about 5 percent of the cows to be in estrus during the breeding season on any given day. Likewise, one also can anticipate 5 percent of the cows to calve on any given day during the calving season.

The typical gestation length for beef cows is 281 to 285 days or something close to that, but it depends on the breed. That only leaves 80 to 85 days (give or take) from the day a cow calves for the cow to conceive a calf for next year. Not unlike the kangaroo, where it is often heard "there is always one in the pouch," the same is true for the cow nine months of the year.

Observe those cows after calving and start making notes. Those cows that have calved should have an estrous cycle within 60 days of calving.

This is important because when the bull is turned out, the cows should be on their second estrous cycle post-calving and be ready to breed. Feed and treat them right and it will work.

Remember the bull. He needs to pass a breeding soundness exam and be fertile prior to being turned out to the cows. The comment "the cows did not seem to be calving as soon as they should be" is a problem from last year.

In a bull, one sperm cell and only one will meet up with the released egg and conceive new life. That one sperm cell was simply a cell until the male system indicated to it that it was to become a sperm cell and have an opportunity to compete with several of its roommates to become a sire.

This doesn't happen overnight. It takes more than 54 days from the time a cell is tapped to become a sperm cell for the cell to run its course and become a mature, healthy sperm cell capable of swimming the distance

Images



Two Rules of Thumb - cows and bulls

to fertilize an egg.

The moral of the story is to get those bulls in shape at least two months prior to the breeding season. Feed, pamper and prepare them for the only destiny they have - to breed and impregnate cows. Failure to perform these two tasks is terminal and far too costly for the owner.

While the current focus is calving, the time is now for one to pay attention and develop some expectations of the upcoming breeding season. It takes two, the cow and the bull. If either fails, so does the operation, particularly the bull.

When one turns a bull out to 30 cows, the expected outcome is 30 calves and only fertile, physically fit bulls can meet the goal. Do not wait; go immediately to the bullpen and evaluate potential sires

Remember, what you do today will reward you with bulls that are in peak fertility 80 days from the start of the calving season.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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Attachments



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EPS - Two Rules of Thumb - cows and bulls

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