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BeefTalk: Cows Pregnant Again in 82 Days

Good body condition is key to the success of the breeding season.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

Are the cows ready to breed?

Assuming a 283-day gestation, if the cow that calved on April 1 wants to maintain her position as the first cow to calve on April 1, she only has 82 days to recoup from calving, start lactating and be cycling the day the bulls arrive in the pasture. And so the question of the day: “Are the cows ready to breed?”

First, a review from the IRM Pocket Reference, which is sponsored by the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association. The IRM Pocket Reference has several good points regarding rebreeding cows, with the focus on the condition of the cows.

Images



columns

[BeefTalk: BeefTalk: Cows Pregnant Again in 82 Days](#) (2017-05-04) Good body condition is key to the success of the breeding season. [FULL STORY](#)

[Prairie Fare: Prairie Fare: Do You Know What Makes Asparagus Unique?](#) (2017-05-04) Asparagus is a nutritional star that is high in fiber, several vitamins and minerals. [FULL STORY](#)

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Cow condition is the primary indicator of the success of the upcoming breeding season. That is also the reason cattle producers are reminded, starting in the fall, to keep cows in fair condition.

As a rule of thumb, the IRM Pocket Reference notes cows with a body condition score of 3 or lower will not rebreed. Cows with condition score 3 or lower have little to no fat cover, with a prominent backbone, hips and ribs evident, and in the extreme case, are emaciated. These cows are not candidates for rebreeding and, if prominent within a herd, the herd needs to have a serious discussion with those who can offer some help.

Poor nutrition and subsequent health issues would more than likely be the foundation of the problem and immediate action must be taken to correct the problems. However, that is not the point of this discussion. Let's focus on the cows that soon will be exposed to the bull.

Body condition changes gradually. As cows add condition, they will advance from those borderline condition score 4s to a condition score of 5 or 6 if fed properly. A good spring certainly will help initiate gain on condition score 4 cows. Thus, make sure pasture management provides good spring pasture.

Moderately conditioned cows, with a condition score of 5 or 6, do not have obviously visible ribs, and the backbone and hips are smoother without

pronounced, obvious visual evidence of individual bones. The cows simply appear physically fit, and move well, alertly and contently. These are the kinds of cows that should be present in cow herds across cattle country and reflect the ability of cattle producers to match cow type to the production environment.

Essentially, this cow is the product of good management and good genetics. No one cow type fits all operations, but the evaluation of body condition prior to breeding does indicate how a producer's cow herd fits into the producer's environment. Cows with body condition scores of 5 or 6 will assure a good pregnancy rate and are certainly worth the producer's effort.

Basically, producers need to evaluate the amount of effort and cost needed to maintain a 5 or 6 condition score. At that point, producers can look for managerial or genetic changes to lower effort and cost.

The IRM Pocket Reference indicates that the pregnancy rate for body condition score 5 cows should be around 86 percent and for body condition score 6 cows, it should be 93 percent. The benchmark for cows calving among North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association beef producers involved in the North Dakota State University Extension Service CHAPS program is 93 percent, showing most producers have their cows at a 5 to 6 condition score.

Perhaps that is why cow herds take decades to establish. And in the end, the reward is a good, sound, productive herd.

With the onset of grazing and cow turnout to cool-season grass, the stage already is set. Do the cows fit the operation? At 93 percent pregnancy rates, the answer is "yes." Anything less should raise an eyebrow.

Remember, cows adjusted to the production environment will maintain a 365-day calving cycle, or in other words, calve every year on time. Cows poorly adapted to the production environment will not.

Cows utilize available feed to recoup from calving, begin lactating and produce milk daily for the calf. For the cows, thoughts of reproducing for next year will not be entertained until those two steps are done, which is why underfed and poorly nourished cows will not maintain a good annual reproductive rate.

The producer has a very hard time making up pre-calving nutritional deficiencies after calving. Thus the saying, "Cows need to fit the environment." The test is the ability to rebreed to produce a calf every year at the desired time for calving.

The bottom line in this discussion is simple: Cows need to be ready to rebreed before calving. That sounds strange, but in reality, this year's breeding

success already has been determined for the typical beef producer.

Make a big note as to the current cow body condition. Plan to check pregnancy this fall and re-visit this issue in the fall armed with information.

A final note: The same applies for the bulls because their condition should match the cows' condition.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension Service agent (<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory>) or Ringwall at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601; 701-456-1103; or [✉kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu](mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu).

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Attachments



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