



BeefTalk 707: Are Your Cows Ready to Rebreed?

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



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The question of the day: Are the cows ready to breed? For many cattle operations, the calving season got started in mid-March, so it will be in full swing soon.

I hope the nutritional plan is in place and the cows are doing

fine. Although nutritional adjustments can be made if needed, precalving should be a time of contentment for the cow, so all she needs to do is enjoy late-term pregnancy.

Nutritionally, the calf is actively, maybe even aggressively, growing in utero while absorbing the nutrition the cow is consuming and preparing for those first moments of daylight. That daylight will happen when the pregnancy terminates with parturition and, I hope, a live, nursing calf will greet the producer in the near future.

Nutritionally, if the cows are underconditioned, every attempt needs to be made to meet and improve the daily nutritional offerings. This will assure that the calf has the opportunity to nurse good colostrum at birth and that the cow will recover quickly from parturition, start lactating and have adequate milk to sustain calf growth.

Unfortunately, if the cow is underconditioned, the consequences probably already are set, which means the cow will not rebreed as quickly as she should. Keep in mind that late gestation and lactation have a nutritional draw on the cow. From now until breeding, feed is needed to meet the cow's postpartum recovery and lactation needs.

In terms of days, let's look at the calendar to help understand the reality of rebreeding cows in the beef business. If the goal is to have a cow that calved this year on April 1 to calve next year on April 1, and assuming a gestation period is 283 days, there are 82 days remaining to have the cow prepare to rebred and conceive a calf for next year.

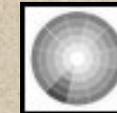
Another important point to consider is that, typically, only 72 percent of the heifers and 60 percent of the cows calve in the first 21 days of the calving season.

Why is that important to know? Let's go back to the number 82. That is the number of days the cow has to rebreed if the producer wants the cow to calve on a desired 365-day calving interval.

If the cow is to maintain her position as the first cow to calve each year, she has 82 days to recoup from calving, start



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lactating and be cycling the day the bulls arrive in the pasture. Keep in mind that cows that are adjusted to the production environment will maintain a 365-day calving cycle. In other words, the cow will calve every year on time.

Cows that are poorly adapted to the production environment will not. Those cows are utilizing whatever feed is available to recoup from calving and then trying to start lactating and produce enough milk for the calf each day. Any thoughts of reproducing for next year will not be entertained until those two steps are done. That is why cows that are underfed and poorly nourished will not maintain a good annual reproductive rate.

The producer has a very hard time making up precalving nutritional deficiencies after calving. Thus the saying: "Cows need to fit the environment." The test for that is the ability of the cow to rebreed and produce a calf every year at the desired time.

There are two ways to measure this adaptability effect. The first being the actual annual calving interval for each cow, a value that should be close to 365 days. However, that is a difficult number to collect. The percentage of the herd that calves the first 21 days of the calving season is easier to calculate and also will note any good or disturbing effects on reproduction within the cow herd.

As was noted earlier, typically 60 percent of the mature cows should be calving within the first 21 days of the calving season. Interestingly, during the last decade of the '90s, just less than 58 percent of the mature cows were calving in the first 21 days. Meanwhile, during the first decade of the new century, those cows enrolled in the CHAPS program through the North Dakota State University Extension Service were at almost 62 percent. That is a remarkable 4 percent jump.

Something good is working in the industry. 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.

If the percentage of mature cows calving is less than 60 percent during the first 21 days of the calving season or lower than is historically normal in the operation, make a big note to revisit this issue next fall while the cows are prone to adding condition.

In the meantime, start keeping a calving book and enjoy calving.

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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