

For the next few weeks we will discuss various factors that have an impact on calf crop percentage. Calf crop percentage can be calculated by:
$$\frac{\text{Number of calves born}}{\text{Number of cows exposed}} \times 100$$

Although a 100% calf crop is ideal, it is not very common. A more typical calf crop percentage is about 85%. If the calf crop is less than 85%, some management changes should be made in order to get that percentage as high as possible.

The first and possibly the most important factor to focus on when attempting to increase calf crop percentage is *nutrition*. Body Condition Score (BCS) is a great indicator of whether or not your cattle are receiving adequate nutrition based on the stage of production that they are in. With winter just around the corner, cows should not be in BCS less than 5. Fall calving cows that are expected to breed back in the next month or two will likely perform better and reach post-partum estrus sooner if they are at a BCS of 6 going into the breeding season. This pre-breeding BCS 6 is critical because the breeding season for fall calving herds takes place in December, January, and February- when forage production is at its lowest.

It is important to take note of expected forage availability for the time of year that the cows are expected to breed back. Doing this will help the producer prepare a winter feeding plan that will aide in putting the cows in a body condition score that will support conception and a full term pregnancy. Additionally, cows in proper BCS will breed back quicker than cows that are not in the recommended body condition when breeding season comes around. Cows that are the first to breed back are typically also the cows that produce calves with the highest weaning weights that ultimately sell for more money. This is often because these calves are born first, thus the oldest to be weaned.

Because nutrition has such a big impact on reproductive ability of the cow, it is important that she receives all the nutrients needed to ensure she is performing as well as possible. By keeping an eye on the body condition of your herd throughout the year, you will be able to adjust accordingly to make sure the cows are in the right BCS for the stage of production they are in. Doing so has the potential to not only increase calf crop percentage, but also return a larger income.

It is important to note that spring calving cows can have a lower BCS at breeding and be equally productive. This is due to the difference in forage availability during the breeding season. Stay tuned for an e-mail focused on BCS of spring calving cows.

For more information regarding BCS, please refer to the July e-mail titled "Body Condition Score".

Thanks,

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