

With stocker and feeder cattle setting record prices, many producers are making plans to take advantage of this potentially profitable opportunity to expand their herd sizes. For many, this may seem to be a one-step process comprised of simply acquiring the desired amount of replacement females. However, in the next few weeks we will discuss the many things that should be considered when expanding your herd.

Perhaps one of the most important things to take into consideration is the amount of females that you wish to have in your herd. To best calculate this number you should first evaluate the amount of forage available. Stocking rate is important in every operation, and should be closely managed to ensure that your pastures are not being overgrazed, as overgrazing may hinder the quantity and quality of forage production in that pasture. Further, a producer should assess the financial status of his operation before expanding his herd. If your operation is not physically and financially capable of accommodating more cattle, it is probably not wise to commit to herd expansion.

If you have determined that your operation *can* support the production of more cattle, you should then calculate a 20% cull rate on potential replacement females, regardless of whether or not they have been raised or purchased. This figure takes into account the percentage of females that may be culled due to issues such as inability to conceive, or poor growth performance. For example, a producer owns 100 cows, but determines that his operation can support an expansion of 10% more cattle, or 10 more females. However, with the 20% cull rate that we discussed, the producer determines that he should plan to have 13 more females to begin with. This allows the producer plenty of cushion for if/when he decides to cull females due to the reasons mentioned above. The producer knows that he has the ability to expand his herd by 10, yet plans to start with 13 because he understands that he is very likely to have unproductive females that will need to be culled. Please keep in mind that on average a producer will lose 10-13% of his/her herd each year due to culling procedures. If you want to expand your herd, you must account for this loss **plus** the herd expansion number you have calculated.

It may be tempting to join the many producers that are jumping at the opportunity to increase their herd size. Before you make a rash decision, carefully and thoroughly examine your operation. How many cattle can you afford to add without negatively impacting the productivity and profitability? Please contact us if you would like assistance calculating this for your operation. Next week we will discuss a management step that should be taken once you have accurately determined just how many females can be added to your herd.

Thanks,
Dr. Jesse Richardson

Henderson County Veterinary Hospital
903-675-5613
hcvethospital.com
hcvethosp@.me.com