

The management program that a producer has for his replacement females will have a lifelong effect on their productivity. In order for the cattle to be the best they can be, the management plan should be carefully thought out, and then executed. Over the past several weeks we have provided various management steps that may be taken to improve the replacement female program of your operation. These steps are designed to not only improve the productivity of an operation as a whole, but of each animal individually. This week we will discuss a management area that directly affects the females, and their progeny, and sets both up for a successful future.

The primary purpose for having replacement females is to replace those females that have been removed from the herd because they are unproductive, or are otherwise simply undesirable. The main job of a replacement female is to be productive and reproductively efficient. To create an animal that fits this role, a producer must understand the great importance of having a sound reproductive program in his operation. Studies show that the main cause for death loss in a cow/calf operation is attributed to dystocia, or difficulty calving. Further, the main cause for dystocia is due to large calves and/or undersized females. This means that most death loss problems can likely be resolved simply by being aware of the genetics and phenotypes of the cattle to be mated, and by being proactive to ensure that dystocia does not occur in your herd. A good way to be proactive is to pay special attention to the size of the females and the bulls that they will be mated to. As we stated last week, it is important to keep track of the female's weight in relation to her stage of production. It is good to aim for these benchmarks, as it has been proven that heifers at 80-85% of their mature weight at first calving have less dystocia compared to smaller heifers. In addition to weight, pelvic size greatly affects the female's ability to calve. Females with larger pelvic areas often have much less dystocia than females with small pelvic areas.

Properly timing the calving of the females is also necessary. Many producers choose to begin their heifer breeding season a couple of weeks before the cow breeding season begins. Breeding, and thus calving the heifers before the cows allows more time and labor to be given to the heifers, should any issues arise during calving season. This provides the producer with more time to watch the heifers more closely and give assistance with delivery, if needed. Further, because first calf heifers are still growing themselves, they often incur more stress from calving and meeting their nutritional requirements compared to adult cows. Calving the heifers before the cows provides the females with extra time to calve, and fully recover so they can breed at the same time as the adult cows by the time the next breeding season begins.

Of course, the sire also plays a role in the size of progeny that is produced. To best reduce incidences of dystocia, virgin females should be bred to a low birth weight, calving ease bull. This will help improve the chances that his calves will be smaller at birth, increasing the female's calving ease. It is important to remember that young bulls don't necessarily sire small calves. Additionally, some cattle breeds are very well known for producing low birth weight, good calving ease cattle. Instead of guessing about what type of progeny the bull will have, do the research, and use a bull with the phenotype and genetics that have proven to be desirable for what you are wanting for your operation.

Take good care of your replacement heifers, and aim to create every opportunity possible to increase the calving ease of those females. With calf prices as high as they are, it is wise to do whatever necessary to increase the chances of getting a live, healthy calf on the ground. If you have any questions about bull selection, or reproductive management of replacement females, please contact us.

Thanks,

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