

It is no secret that dystocia, or difficulty calving, can cause a huge economic loss in an operation, but what you may not know is that some reports show that estimated losses resulting from dystocia in the beef industry may equal or even exceed \$750,000,000 annually. This is a large sum that can be greatly decreased if producers alter their method of heifer management for their operation. Although it is impossible to completely reduce any chance that dystocia will affect your herd, there *are* some steps that can be taken to reduce the percentage of females in your herd that experience calving difficulty.

With cattle prices as high as they are, it is important to do what we can to make sure our cattle are producing live, healthy calves. One key way to ensure that your females are reproductively mature enough to cycle, breed, and calve successfully is to perform a reproductive tract soundness (RTS) exam that includes a pelvic area measurement. Although many factors can play a role in causing dystocia, many researchers agree that the single major cause of dystocia is due to a disproportion between the size of the calf at birth, and the female's pelvic area. Small pelvic size can affect cattle of any age, but seems to have the largest negative impact on first calf heifers. In fact, the pelvic area of a heifer may account for anywhere between 30 and 70% of dystocia problems in heifers. If pelvic area can be efficiently managed, we believe that the occurrence of dystocia in your herd will decrease.

Pelvic measurements should be taken approximately one month before the breeding season is to begin, at the same time the RTS exam is performed. Several different instruments are available to measure the pelvic area, but each type serves the same purpose- to measure the width and height of the pelvis at its widest points. These numbers are measured in centimeters, and then multiplied to equal the pelvic area of that female. It is best to measure each heifer in the herd, then eliminate any potential problem female before the breeding season begins. Many producers find it most effective to cull the smallest 10% of heifers based on pelvic area. Although larger females will generally have a larger pelvis, this is not always the case, so it is best to measure each heifer for her actual pelvic area. Studies show that a normal 600 pound yearling heifer should have a pelvic area measuring 11 centimeters wide and 12 centimeters high in order to deliver a 63 pound calf. This may help serve as a guide when deciding which heifers should be kept or culled prior to breeding.

Researchers have found that pelvic area is a very heritable trait. This further exemplifies the importance of selecting for heifers that have larger pelvic areas. It is important to note that selecting for pelvic area will not eliminate all instances of dystocia altogether. Producers should remember to be very aware of the type of bull that they plan to breed the heifers to. Breed of bull and his EPDs can be used to help the producer make a decision on whether or not that bull should be used on virgin females. If you have any questions about reducing dystocia by managing pelvic area or birth weight, please contact us. Next week we will continue this discussion and explain how RTS can help predict the future reproductive performance of the females. Please refer to the link below to read the full article referenced in this week's article: http://www.iowabeefcenter.org/Beef%20Cattle%20Handbook/Calving_Difficulty-1.pdf

Prices for feeder steers medium and large 1 sold through the Oklahoma National Stockyards on Monday, October 20, 2014 are as follows: 469lb- \$305.92, 565lb- \$274.54, 662lb- \$246.79, and 772lb- \$239.05.

The price for November 2014 750lb feeder steers on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange was \$228.4cwt on closing Monday, October 20, 2014.

Thanks,

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