

# Early Weaning Is Found To Boost Young Cows' Reproduction Efficiency

Weaning fall beef calves early - at about 2 months of age instead of the usual 6½ months - increases reproductive efficiency of young cows.

In studies at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center, Clay Center, Nebr., early weaning increased the percentage of cows coming into heat in a 42-day breeding season. Pregnancy rates, as a result, increased 26 percent in 2-year-old cows, 16 percent in 3-year-olds, and 8 percent in mature cows, when compared with pregnancy rates of similar cows whose calves were weaned at the conventional time. The Center is a unit of USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

Whether or not early weaning would be an efficient practice depends upon the management and feed production situation, ARS physiologist Danny B. Laster points out. He says early weaning may be an effective management tool with young or late-calving cows in colder regions, particularly when crop residues or pastures would support fall grazing by the cows but are inadequate for cow-calf pairs. Early weaning might be similarly useful in emergency drought situations. Other possible applications include cow herds managed for fall calving or in semiconfinement.

Dr. Laster evaluated early weaning with 308 Hereford, Angus, Charolais-cross, Red Poll, and Brown Swiss cows ranging in age from two to 11 years. The calving period

extended from Aug. 7 to Oct. 12, and the 42-day breeding period began 28 days after the last cow had calved. Eight days before the start of the breeding period, calves were weaned from 98 of the cows. Calves from the remaining 210 cows were weaned at the conventional time. The early-weaned calves ranged in age from 34 to 76 days, with an average of 55 days. All cows were maintained on pasture and were bred by artificial insemination.

Early weaning increased the percentage of cows coming into heat from calving through the breeding period by 29 percent in 2-year-olds, 27 percent in 3-year-olds, and 16 percent in cows 4 years of age and older. In the first 21 days of breeding, early weaning increased the percentage of 2- and 3-year-old cows ready to breed by 39 and 24 percent, respectively, but did not similarly affect mature cows.

Laster says the calving date also influenced the interval from calving to first breeding in cows of all ages. Cows calving earlier in the season were ready for breeding in a shorter time. The intervals from calving to coming into heat, and from calving to first breeding, were longer in Brown Swiss cows 4 years of age and older than in cows of other breeds.

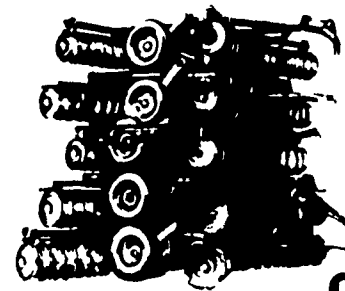
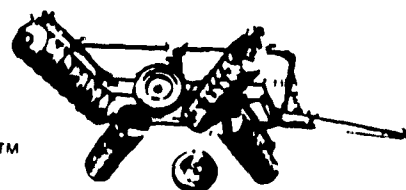
The number of inseminations required per conception was not influenced by early weaning. Likewise, it had no effect on calf gain up to one year of age.

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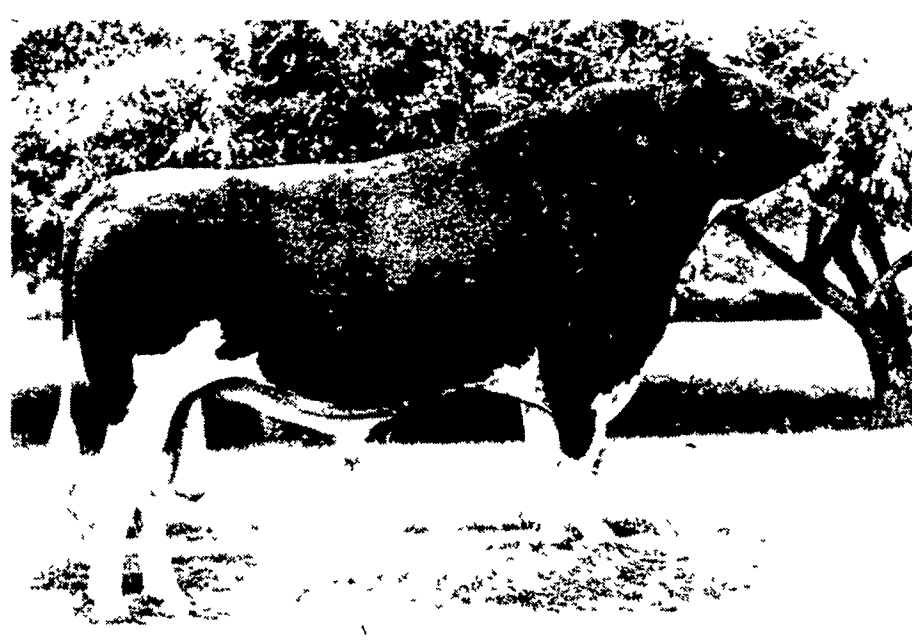
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