

New Tools Help Cattlemen Stay Competitive

Des Moines, Iowa — Cattlemen looking for ways to stay competitive in today's beef industry have to take advantage of the latest technology available for boosting performance.

Two tools they should include in their management kit are implanting calves to put on extra pounds from birth to weaning, and synchronizing estrus to concentrate the breeding period and subsequent calving period for heifers and cows.

That was the essence of messages delivered to animal scientists by Dr. Dave Whittington and Dr. Gene Deutscher at a recent seminar sponsored by Syntex Animal Health, Inc.

The seminar preceded the opening of the midwest section of the American Society of Animal Science meeting here.

Whittington is an extension beef specialist at the South Dakota State University Agricultural Research and Extension Center. Deutscher is an extension beef specialist at the University of Nebraska North Platte Experiment Station.

Whittington made his comments

regarding implanted calves based on trials he conducted last summer involving more than 600 steer and more than 700 heifer calves. The trials took place on three ranches scattered throughout the state with different herd genetics and different management practices.

All calves involved in the trials were implanted with one of three implant products at first processing. A fourth group was left as a non-implanted control.

Calves were all born within a short period of each other and gate cut into the specific implant or control groups. None were from first calf heifers.

Results varied some from ranch to ranch. However, pooled results from the three ranches showed an advantage for the implanted calves.

Steer calves implanted with Synovex C, designed specifically for calves, weighed 16.7 pounds more at weaning than did calves in the control group. Ralgro-implanted and Compudose-implanted steer calves weighed 13.5 and 6.5 pounds, respectively, more than the controls. Heifer calves showed a slightly

better response to the implants. Those implanted with Synovex C weighed 20.6 pounds more than the controls. The Ralgro-implanted heifers calves weighed 18.5 pounds more.

None of the heifer calves were implanted with Compudose since the product is not cleared for use in heifer calves.

The increased gains in the implanted calves points to the value of this management technique, Whittington told the group. Overall, the implanted calves showed improved performance compared with the non-implanted controls despite the differences in genetics and management among the three ranches and the drought-induced, poor calf-growing conditions at two of the ranches.

Shortening the calving period as much as possible for first-calf heifers is crucial to successful rebreeding of these females, Deutscher told the animal scientists. First-calf heifers need time after calving to let their bodies adjust so they'll exhibit strong estrus.

The University of Nebraska beef specialist said that synchronizing estrus in heifers using a prostaglandin can accomplish this goal by shortening the breeding period. Not only does this concentrate the subsequent calving season, there is some indication synchronized heifers calve earlier than those not synchronized.

Heifers in a trial he conducted last summer using prostaglandins calved about four days earlier this spring than their non-synchronized counterparts, he said.

Though most of Deutscher's seven years of experience with synchronization has involved A.I., he indicated to the group that synchronization also would help

shorten the breeding and calving periods when females are bred naturally.

Deutscher believes that 30 days is a realistic length for the breeding period. A well managed synchronization program should let you get 90 percent of heifers bred in 30 days, he said. In fact in last summer's trial using the Bovilene brand prostaglandin, 88.3 percent of the synchronized heifers in the trial were pregnant at the end of 30 days.

Deutscher's goal is to develop simple methods of improving reproduction in beef cattle. Heat synchronization, when managed properly, is one tool for accomplishing that goal, he said.

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