

Beef Briefs

by
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BREEDING SEASON IS APPROACHING

In spite of snow, then mud, then rain, then mud, then more mud, the grass has again become green. This means we are fast approaching breeding season for beef cattle in our part of the world.

It may sound as simple as turning out a bull, but in fact breeding season management is a key strategy to profitability. Here are a few of the important factors for a successful breeding season.

The first criteria for planning a successful breeding season is to evaluate the body condition of the cows. Those cows that are on the thin side (when you can see more than two ribs from the side) will have to start gaining some weight if we expect them to get bred back for next year. The usual way to put weight on a cow is with corn, and it is cheap enough that it would be the feed of choice.

There are several possible causes for those cows that have started losing some weight since calving. If the forage quality is not what it should be, they probably need some additional energy from corn. This would also be true for those cows that are not getting enough forage.

If "they are getting all the hay they want" be sure to evaluate the tonnage being offered and subtract what they are not eating. The latter will be about 30 percent of what is

offered in big bales without a feeder, and about 50 percent of what is rolled out on the ground. Intake is not the same as what you put out there, and they only part that counts is what they eat.

Secondly, for some heavier milking cows on fair to poor forage (or any corn silage), there could be a protein deficiency in the ration. This need can probably be met most economically by feeding soybean meal.

A heavy-milking cow requires the equivalent of 4-5 pounds of soybean meal daily to meet protein requirements. If the forage is primarily grass or of poor quality, the cow may need 2-3 pounds of soybean meal daily to meet her needs.

The objective of a breeding season is to get the cows pregnant in as short a time as possible. Healthy cows in the best possible condition will not be bred next fall if there is a bull problem.

First, the bulls should be fertile, healthy, and in good flesh. The best way to test fertility is with a breeding soundness exam (BSE). Unless the bull came from a central test station, this exam may not be possible. The next best test of fertility in young bulls is testicle size. Yearling bulls should have a scrotal circumference of at least 32 centimeters to be considered for breeding purposes.

Second, there should be enough bull power available to get the job

done. Bulls from 1-2 years old can service 15-20 cows, those 2-3 years old can service 20-30 cows, and even mature bulls should not be expected to service more than 40-50 cows. If there are too many cows in the pasture, the calf crop will tend to be unnecessarily strung out.

Breed yearling heifers about 20-30 days ahead of the rest of the herd. This will do two things for you. First, calves from heifers are notoriously smaller than those from mature cows, so a calf that is a little older next year will help retain the uniformity of your calf crop. Second, the heifer that calves first as a two-year old has a severe nutritional stress imposed on her. That stress often will result in them not getting bred on time for a second calf. The little extra time she will have before the breeding season starts next year will be an advantage in being able to start cycling on time to be bred.

The most important factor of a good breeding season is not starting it on time, but ending it on time. It is more important to shut the gate on the bull at the right time than it is to open the gate at any specific time.

Most herds will function most efficiently with a 60-day breeding season. After 60 days in the pasture, take the bull out for 75-90 days, palpate the herd, remove the open cows, than turn him back out.

The definition and organization of the calving season is the single most effective way a breeder can manage feed resources, health programs, marketing programs, and labor use.

The Calving Dilemma

It seems like every year there is another new problem that crops up at calving time. This year it was not a new problem, but one that we

have visited before.

In 1980, when I was in Missouri, I first heard the term "weak calf syndrome" (whenever we really don't know what it is we call it a syndrome.) Calves that are born "dumb," fail to nurse, remain weak after birth, and die in a few days are the classic symptoms. Many producers have told me of their unpleasant experiences with the problem this year.

I wish there was a good answer to correct this problem, but there is not. Extensive research has been done, but there is no real clear-cut

answer on what causes the weak calves.

There is some indication that a protein deficiency in the pregnant cow will contribute to the problem. My experience has been that it will rear up when there is an extreme environmental stress just prior to calving.

Tough winters, cold weather, a lot of snow, cold rains, etc. are the typical times I have heard of it. Do those conditions sound familiar?

Unfortunately, it remains one of those "wait till next year" problems.

Senate Moves

Nutrient Management

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Nutrient management legislation which already passed the state House of Representatives came out of the Senate Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee this week without change.

The proposed law in House Bill 100 is the cumulative effect of years of debate over strategies to control the flow of nutrients into the state's water supply.

A pact signed by Gov. Robert Casey, on behalf of Pennsylvania, and the governors of other states with significant drainage into the Chesapeake Bay had targeted a 40-percent reduction in the nutrient levels reaching the bay by 2000.

The nutrient management legislation in H.B.100 would create a program where high-density animal agriculturalists would be required to file a plan for handling of excessive manure. Currently,

the number of producers involved is expected to be small, although the program allows and encourages voluntary plans to reduce liability.

The proposal would also eliminate local ordinances controlling the application of manure onto land. This was sought because it local law ends with local municipal boundaries. Many farming operations cross municipal boundaries.

According to agricultural lobbyists, the proposal was passed by the Senate Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee without any amendments offered.

The state's leading agricultural organizations are expected to push for the bill to be passed without amendments, which would expedite its passage through the now Democrat-controlled Senate and onto the governor's desk.

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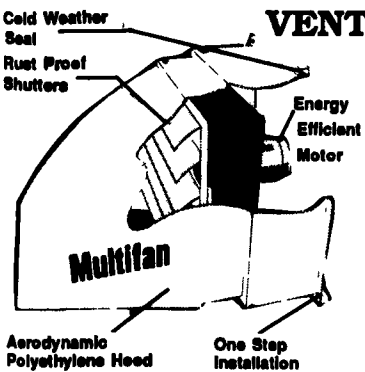
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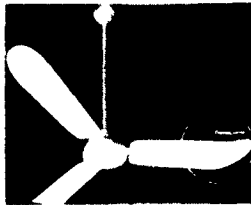


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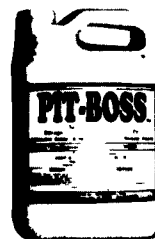


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