

# Manager Shares Breeding, Calving, Weaning Expertise

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November," he said.

Four herd bulls sire half of the calf crop, while the other half are AI-sired. Three of the four bulls are homebred.

"We've been operating more and more as a closed herd for the last several years," said Livingston. "The health status is just simplified by not bringing in anything from outside."

"We keep so many records, so we know more about a bull that we raised in our own program," he said. Since the farm has a cow's pedigree, plus information on carcasses and ultrasound, they can measure more traits more ef-

fectively about each of the South Branch animals, said Livingston. He prefers that the farm sample and prove their own bulls.

"There would be nothing more gratifying than to raise and prove out a bull to be put into stud service and put into significant use across the industry," he said. "A lot of the work that we do is geared toward that, with all the data we collect."

### Calving Time

Approximately two-thirds of the cows calve in the spring and the remaining third in the fall.

This arrangement lets the bulls rest for several months between breeding seasons, spreads labor requirements, and offers differing

marketing opportunities for the calves.

Two calf crops spread the marketing out over more of the year, which helps with cash flow, according to Livingston. "The marketing opportunity for the fall calves are almost always greater than for the spring program," he said. "The cattle have an age advantage over spring-born calves."

As feeder calves, they are at weaning age for when grass is greening, so the price is at a premium for the calves. They also seem to hit a hole in the market to command a premium as finished cattle, according to Livingston.

One challenge facing fall-born calves is the winter mud. "Mud gets to be cumbersome with young calves nursing," he said. "Cattle handle cold temperatures well, but mud gets to be pretty devastating."

The cattle calving in the fall are checked morning and evening. The spring calvers are checked more often, however, since there are more cows calving and more environmental conditions. Twins and bad weather are some of the biggest concerns during calving season, he said.

This coming calving season will begin about January 29. However, the biggest month is in February, and "they'll trickle on into March and the first part of April," he said.

"One change we're going to try this winter is pregnancy testing by ultrasound instead of strictly by palpation for a more accurate estimate of when cows are due," said Livingston. This allows them to sift off the bottom 25 of the last cows and have them wintered separately. This arrangement, said Livingston, should cut feed costs.

The later-calving cows will be the last animals off the corn stalk grazing area, and will be given the lower-quality hay since they will be calving in the last part of March or early April, when the pastures begin to green up.

The cows are separated into several groups designated by when they are expected to calve.

Now, instead of running to three different places to calve, the animals are grouped, allowing Livingston to do feed partitioning since the nutritional needs differ. "We can give the cows closest to calving higher quality orchard-grass and the first

er in nutrients."

There are three groups: first-calf heifers, early calving mature cows, and later calving mature cows. Only two groups should calve at a given time, he said.

As the cows approach 2-3 weeks before their expected due date, they are sorted off of the herd in the wintering field, given a precalving vaccination, and put into the calving field, where there are 20-30 other cows that are checked several times a day.

The setup also simplifies matters if bad weather threatens, said Livingston. "We'll pull in six or 10 of the closest-calving cows overnight in snow or bad weather," he said. In fact, the system is "vitally important in the spring, with mud and more weather concerns," he said.

The calving fields are not grazed for months before they are used, so the grass has a chance to grow to 10-12 inches.

This helps keep the calves out of the mud, "almost like they're calving on a bedded field," he said. Also, "the cows do utilize that. They'll eat very little hay the first couple of weeks as they graze that stockpiled forage."

Once the calf gets its feet under it, and is able to nurse for a day or two, the pair is moved to a third field. This "doesn't allow calf manure to build up on the calving field, which I really think cuts down on the cases of scours,


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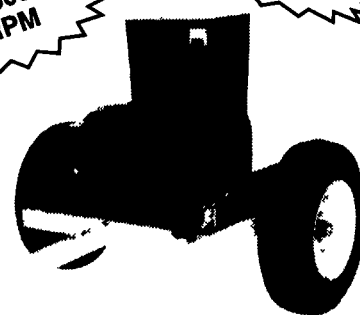
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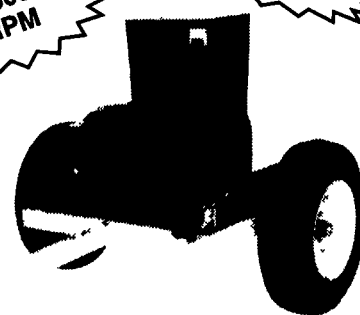
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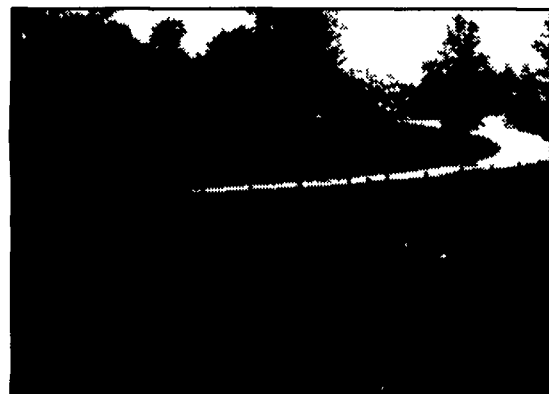
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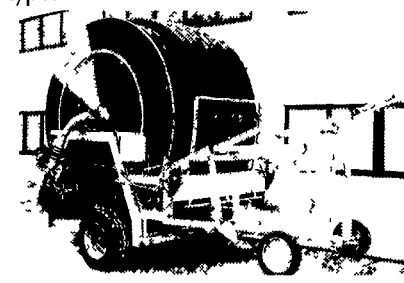
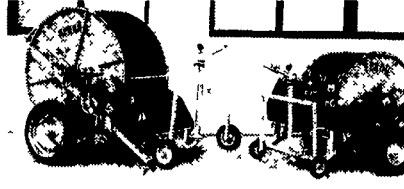


cutting hay, which tests high-Designer Genes, or "DJ" is one of the four herd sires. DJ, was the top bull from a Production Angus Associates sale several years ago. Most of the herd sires, however, are homebred animals.

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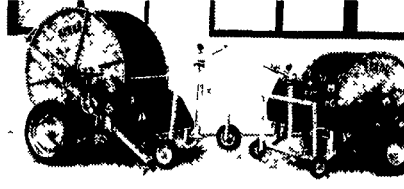

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