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Applying Reproductive Technologies

Producer panel explains how reproductive technologies help their operation.

by *Kasey Brown*, associate editor

“I don’t understand why the whole world doesn’t use applied reproductive technologies, at least on heifers,” said Herbert Holzapfel of Holzapfel Ranch near Willows, Calif. Holzapfel was one of a panel of cattlemen who spoke about the practical application of applied reproductive technologies (ART) in their operations during the 2015 Applied Reproductive Strategies in Beef Cattle (ARSBC) symposium in Davis, Calif.

Holzapfel is a commercial Angus cattleman whose No. 1 selection criteria for his herd is fertility. Bred entirely by artificial insemination (AI), the females who stay on his ranch must be bred by the first service with the first straw of semen.

He started using AI in the early 1970s, but was really sold on it in the early 1980s. Beaten out as a buyer on the bull he wanted at a sale, he decided he could make his own high-quality cattle by using AI instead. He does use a synchronization program and says even with working the cattle multiple times, it only takes about 3-4 minutes per cow. He added that facilities are not the end-all, be-all of AI success.

He said his biggest concern with AI is the quality of the semen, because not all bulls are created equal. However, he commended AI companies for starting to provide information relative to the conception rates of bulls used through AI.

Doug Worthington of Vintage Angus, Modesto, Calif., has a purebred operation and uses embryo transfer (ET) and AI extensively. He explained that they flush 10-12 cows



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► A panel of cattlemen spoke about the practical application of applied reproductive technologies (ART) in their operations. Pictured are (from right) Herbert Holzapfel of Holzapfel Ranch near Willows, Calif.; Doug Worthington of Vintage Angus, Modesto, Calif.; and Michael Hall, the West coast representative for Wulf Cattle.

every 21 days. To maximize their genetic potential, he uses DNA testing with all of his breeding stock.

He emphasized that extreme attention to detail and trust in his team has garnered high (65%-72%) pregnancy rates with ART. Heats are checked every few hours, and females are bred when their biology dictates, even if that is at 2 a.m. Worthington said they average about 11 viable embryos per cow.

Michael Hall, the West coast representative for Wulf Cattle, explained a possible solution to the low cow herd numbers. By using AI, sexed semen and genetic testing, Limousin bulls were mated to Jersey females to form a complementary mating. No calving problems were experienced, and conception rates were high even with sexed semen. Instead of

essentially giving away Jersey bulls now, the mating has provided a quality beef product.

All three panelists said that ART was useful and easy enough to use with some effort. Attention to detail garners more positive results.

The panel presentation concluded Monday’s ARSBC sessions. Visit the Newsroom at www.appliedreprostrategies.com to view his PowerPoint, read the proceedings or listen to his presentation.



Editor’s Note: Comprehensive coverage of the symposium is available online at www.appliedreprostrategies.com. Compiled by the Angus Journal editorial team, the site is made possible through sponsorship by the Beef Reproduction Task Force.