

# VETERINARY CALL

by Bob Larson, Kansas State University

## New Year's Veterinary Resolutions

*The start of 2021 should include veterinary management and care in terms of veterinary practices and management.*

The start of a new year is a great time to plan and set goals for a beef herd. As a veterinarian, here are my top 10 goals I would recommend for cow-calf producers in 2021:

- Monitor body condition throughout the year — particularly when cows are grazing dormant forage or being fed baled hay. If necessary, adjust type and amount of supplemental feed to maintain adequate body condition.
- Perform a thorough breeding soundness examination (sometimes referred to as a BSE) of all bulls prior to the start of the breeding season. Bulls that successfully bred cows in previous seasons may have reduced fertility due to injury, disease or age-related changes.
- Detect pregnancy status of cows early enough to investigate potential breeding problems and to plan management practices to optimize cull cow value.
- Select and develop heifers so a high percentage of replacements become pregnant during the first few weeks of a heifer breeding season, which begins earlier than the mature cow breeding season.
- Develop several calving pastures, so newborn calves can spend the first few weeks of life in a clean environment, separated from older calves.
- Plan a weaning strategy that minimizes stress and any calf health problems.
- Be prepared for emergencies such as calving difficulty and injuries. Obtain equipment, maintain necessary facilities, and become knowledgeable of basic care.
- Plan a vaccination strategy for calves and cows to address disease risks for your herd. This includes vaccination of calves to decrease risk of clostridial diseases such as blackleg; protection from risk of pregnancy loss due to viral diseases such as infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) and bovine viral diarrhea (BVD); and protection of calves against respiratory disease due to viruses like IBR, BVD and bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV).
- Establish a plan to control internal parasites (worms) and external parasites (flies and lice) that focuses on age groups and times of the year with the greatest effect. While the goal is not complete elimination of internal parasites, it is important to recognize young growing calves, replacement heifers and bulls are typically at higher risk of negative consequences of an internal parasite. Fly populations change greatly throughout the year based on environmental conditions, and a fly-control strategy is needed.
- Identify cost-effective grazing options for times when forage is dormant (crop residue fields, cover crops, stockpiled forage). Many studies have identified financial benefits for herds that spend more days grazing. Identify local options based on the variety of native or introduced forages available.

The list of New Year's resolutions for your herd may be different than my suggestions, but regardless of where you see opportunities for improved management in 2021, I encourage you to spend some time identifying ways to make this year the best possible for your herd. **AJ**

*Editor's note: Robert L. Larson is a professor of production medicine and executive director of Veterinary Medicine Continuing Education at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kan.*