

Angus Advisor

March Beef Cow Herd Management Tips

Upper Midwest Region

by Harlan Ritchie, Michigan State University

1. March and April are heavy calving months. Be prepared.
 - a. Keep calving areas as clean and dry as possible.
 - b. Check herd frequently; be ready to assist cows not making progress after one to two hours of hard labor.
 - c. Give first-calf heifers extra attention. Nationally, the average assistance rate on 2-year-old first-calf heifers is 30%-35%.
 - d. Don't leave cows and calves in tight quarters for more than one or two days — this can lead to scours and respiratory problems. Calves will stay healthier outdoors as long as they have a dry place to lie down and a reasonable windbreak.
 - e. For maximum disease prevention, get colostrum into the calf as soon after calving as possible (three hours or sooner). Have frozen colostrum on hand for emergency feeding.
 - f. In cold weather, be prepared to provide supplemental heat for chilled, weak calves.
2. Be prepared to give fluids to scouring calves that become dehydrated. Consult your veterinarian for advice.
3. If cows calve in thin condition (body condition score [BCS] 4 or less), they will need to receive enough energy to put them in moderate to good condition (BCS 5-6) by the start of breeding season.
4. Plan your spring fertilizer needs.
 - a. On cool-season grasses (brome, orchard grass, fescue, timothy), 100 pounds (lb.) of nitrogen per acre can give an extra ton or more of dry matter and can double carrying capacity in the first half of the grazing season. For best results, apply 50 lb. of nitrogen in early spring and apply another 50 lb. in late spring.

- b. For legume-grass mixes, use potassium and phosphorus. Soil tests should determine the precise needs. Overfertilization is neither cost-effective nor environmentally compatible.

Southern Region

by R.S. Sand, University of Florida

1. Prepare land for summer crops.
2. Begin grazing warm-season permanent pastures.
3. Check and fill mineral feeder.
4. Observe bulls for condition and success. Rotate and rest if needed.
5. Deworm cows as needed.
6. Make sure calves are healthy and making good weight gains.
7. Hang forced-use dust bags by April 1 for external parasite control, or use insecticide-impregnated ear tags.
8. Identify, vaccinate, implant and work late calves.
9. Put bulls out March 1 for calving season to start Dec. 9.
10. Remove bulls March 22 to end calving season Jan. 1.

Rocky Mountain West Region

by Doug Hixon, University of Wyoming

1. With calving season well under way in the majority of this region, much energy is being expended toward getting calves delivered and making sure they receive an appropriate amount of colostrum. When wind chills are below 20° F, offer newborns some protection from the elements and enough heat to get them dried off and on their way.
2. Once the newborn is independent, move the cow-calf pair to clean ground where cattle aren't concentrated any more than absolutely necessary. Offer some protection from the weather in the form of portable calf shelters or natural habitat such as willows. The portable protection allows movement on a regular basis to again keep the environment as free as possible from disease organisms.
3. Closely watch newborn calves for signs

of scours, and work with your veterinarian on proper treatment. Hopefully your prepartum vaccination program will result in a minimum of problems. However, dehydration can occur rapidly, so it's critical to respond quickly to a problem.

4. Monitor body condition on cows. Severe winter weather can take its toll on body condition. Once the cow begins to lactate, her nutrient requirements increase considerably. Energy requirements for a 1,100-lb. cow in the last third of gestation increase from 11.2 lb./day total digestible nutrients (TDN) to 13-13.5 lb. TDN once she starts lactating, assuming she produces approximately 15 lb. of milk per day. The higher the milk production, the higher the energy requirement. Her protein intake should also increase about 0.5 lb./day (from 1.6 lb./day crude protein to 2-2.1 lb.).
5. Monitor heifer development. Remember, heifers should weigh 60%-65% of their mature weight to reach puberty prior to breeding. Research from Miles City, Mont., suggests enhanced conception if heifers have at least one estrous cycle prior to the start of the breeding season.
6. During the hectic calving season, don't ignore herd bulls and young bulls that are being developed for sale. Keep bulls bedded and out of mud and snow to avoid testicle damage during severe winter temperatures.
7. If you've had a problem with grass tetany in the past when cows in early lactation graze lush spring forages, plan ahead to have some magnesium oxide available to add to the salt/mineral mix. Magnesium oxide should be supplemented a couple months prior to grazing if a problem exists. Offering mineral supplement of 30% salt, 30% di-cal (or phosphorus source), 30% magnesium oxide and 10% dried molasses (or anything rather palatable) will usually suffice. This mix is about 18% magnesium. Grass tetany is more often a problem where heavy-milking cows are grazing grass forages on magnesium-deficient soils during the first couple months of lactation.
8. Start thinking about breeding season and planning your genetic program for the production of next year's calf crop.
9. **Think spring!**

Midwest Region

by Twig Marston, Kansas State University

■ Preventive medicine and health

1. Separate lactating cows from pregnant cows.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 163

- Maintain good sanitation practices around calving and newborn areas. Think clean and dry.
- Treat calves with scours promptly.
- Get colostrum into calves as soon as possible after calving — ideally, within four hours after birth.
- Frequently check females close to calving, and assist if progress is hindered.

■ Nutrition

- Monitor BCS. Moderate condition at calving does not compromise future reproduction.
- Balance cow rations to optimize cow production.
- Utilize high-quality forages like cereal-grain pastures.
- Prepare for prescribed burning, which will be dated by the past year's weather, the location and the present year's weather.

■ Reproduction

- Maintain your calving strategies.
- Semen-test bulls. Check their feet, testicles, body condition and physical fitness.
- When purchasing new bulls or ordering semen, use performance records judiciously.
- Supplement and feed cows to maintain or improve body condition at calving to enhance rebreeding performance.

■ General recommendations

- Sample soil to determine spring fertilizer requirements of improved pastures.
- Eradicate cedars and brush, and improve forage quality.
- Attend meetings to increase knowledge base.
- Keep accurate production and financial records.

Editor's Note: This month we welcome Twig Marston as a new "Angus Advisor" columnist. Accompanying this month's column is a brief description of each of the specialists contributing to this column.



M E E T T H E E X P E R T S

DOUG HIXON

University of Wyoming, Extension beef specialist

Born on a livestock and grain farm in east-central Illinois, Doug Hixon graduated from the University of Illinois (U of I) with a bachelor's degree in agricultural science in 1968. He went on to receive his master's and doctorate from the U of I in ruminant nutrition, and nutrition and reproductive physiology, respectively.

While working on his doctorate at U of I, he managed the Urbana campus beef cattle research unit. Upon graduation he took a position as beef cattle Extension specialist at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Since 1982 he has been at the University of Wyoming (UW) where his appointment includes Extension, teaching and research.

While at UW he formed the Wyoming Beef Cattle Improvement Association (WBCIA) in 1984 and has served as its executive secretary since then.



Doug Hixon

TWIG MARSTON

Kansas State University, Extension beef specialist

A Kansas native, Twig Marston was raised on a diversified farm and ranch operation. He was active in 4-H and FFA prior to attending Kansas State University (K-State).

While at K-State he was a member of the meat and livestock judging teams.

After graduation he raised and showed purebred cattle on his family's operation. He also managed a ranch in Nebraska for several years before returning to graduate school to earn degrees in genetics and animal breeding from K-State and in ruminant nutrition from Oklahoma State University.

Before returning to K-State as an Extension beef specialist, Marston was a nutritionist for Hubbard Milling Co.



Twig Marston

HARLAN RITCHIE

Michigan State University, Extension beef specialist

Raised near Albert City, Iowa, on a general livestock and grain farm, Harlan Ritchie attended Iowa State University (ISU). He graduated from ISU in 1957 with a bachelor's degree in animal husbandry and dairy science with a minor in agricultural communications.

He went on to Michigan State University (MSU) where he earned his doctorate in animal science with minors in biochemistry and physiology.

At MSU his appointment is 90% Extension and 10% research. He is in charge of beef cow-calf Extension and research and is the program leader for animal science Extension.

He has earned numerous honors for his work and has judged national shows for 13 beef breeds and seven swine breeds in the United States and Canada and national Angus shows in Argentina and Australia.



Harlan Ritchie

ROBERT SAND

University of Florida, Extension livestock specialist

Born and raised in Colorado, Robert Sand received his bachelor's degree from Colorado State University (CSU) and his master's and doctorate from the University of Kentucky.

Since 1971 he has been an Extension livestock specialist at the University of Florida. His responsibilities include the Beef Cattle Extension Program with special emphasis on reproductive management and cow-calf production.

He is the secretary of the Florida Beef Cattle Improvement Association (FBCIA) and is the current chairman of the Florida Cattleman's Association's (FCA) Seedstock Council.

He also coordinates the Pasture to Plate Program, a steer-feedout retained-ownership program providing producers an opportunity to collect feedlot performance and carcass data. It is jointly sponsored by the Florida Cooperative Extension Service and the FCA.

His newest responsibility is to supervise the central bull test being established at the new beef center near Marianna, Fla.

