

# Angus Advisor

## Beef Cow Herd Management Tips—Upper Midwest Region

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### MARCH

1. March and April are heavy calving months in the upper Midwest. 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. Be prepared to record birth weights and calving-ease scores.
  - 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.
  - g. Don't leave cows and calves in tight quarters for more than one or two days. Doing so 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. When turned out, put cow-calf pairs in an area that is separate from cows waiting to calve; calves will stay healthier and cows' nutrition can be managed better.
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. Depending upon milking ability and condition score, lactating cows may require 20%-50% more energy than gestating cows.
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.
5. If you need a bull(s) for natural service, know how to interpret and evaluate expected progeny differences (EPDs).
  - a. EPDs are a more accurate predictor of a young bull's genetic ability than are his individual performance data and ratios.
  - b. Breed-average EPDs vary greatly among breeds. Determine the current average EPDs for the breed(s) you use.

### APRIL

1. Prepare for pasture season:
  - a. Check fences and make necessary repairs.
  - b. Beware of grass tetany. Provide supplemental magnesium (Mg) if necessary; a minimum of 11% Mg in the mineral mix is needed for prevention. A high level (15%-20%) is preferred.
  - c. Plan a fly-control program. If fly resistance is a problem, switch to a different chemical family. Pyrethroids and organophosphates are your two choices.
  - d. Castrate and dehorn commercial calves before going to pasture.
2. Get ready for breeding season if you haven't already started.
  - a. Make a final decision on replacement heifers to be kept. Consider palpation of heifers' reproductive tracts and cull those with "infantile" tracts. Yearling heifers should weigh 65% of their potential mature body weight by breeding season.
  - b. If you use artificial insemination (AI), order semen early, check your equipment and replace lost ID tags.
  - c. If your semen tank is 10 years old or older, have it checked for its ability to hold nitrogen—you may need a new tank.
  - d. Consider a breeding soundness exam (BSE) for your bulls. Nationally, 10%-20% of the bulls are questionable or unsatisfactory breeders.
  - e. Make certain handling facilities are in good working order.
  - f. If lactating cows are thin and have not started to cycle, increase the plane of nutrition.
  - g. If bulls are thin, lift their nutritional plane also. Thin bulls wear down faster during breeding season.
  - h. Free-choice mineral mixes should contain 8% phosphorus, which is important for optimum fertility. If your region is known to be deficient in specific trace minerals (selenium, copper, zinc, cobalt, manganese or iodine), make sure your mineral mix is fortified with these elements.
  - i. If IBR, BVD, leptospirosis, vibriosis or haemophilus are problems, vaccinate cows and heifers no later than three weeks prior to breeding season unless annual vaccinations are given during fall roundup.

### MAY

1. Before leaving drylot and going to clean pasture, coccidiosis can be a problem in young calves. Symptoms include dark or bloody scours and reduced performance. Treatment with amprolium is effective. Consult your veterinarian.
2. Research suggests that deworming the herd before going to pasture can result in significantly heavier weaning weights.
3. Beware of bloat on heavy alfalfa or ladino

clover pasture stands. Blocks with poloxalene can help prevent bloat.

4. If horn flies in your area have developed resistance to pyrethroid ear tags, consider the following practices:
  - a. Delay application of insecticidal ear tags until flies become an economically significant problem (100-200 horn flies/animal).
  - b. Switch from pyrethroid tags to those containing an organophosphate, such as diazinon, pirimiphos methyl, fenthion or chlorpyrifos.
  - c. Remove tags in the fall; do not leave them in year-round.
5. Breed heifers one heat period before cows so they have extra time to recover from calving next year.
6. Try to have bulls in moderate to good condition before turning out with cows. Also, they should have received their annual booster vaccinations—IBR, BVD, P13, leptospirosis, vibrio and haemophilus—unless they were given in the fall.
7. Prepare for haying season. Have spare parts ready in advance. Extended periods of downtime can mean the difference between a high- or low-quality hay crop.

### JUNE

1. If calves are 4 months old, vaccinate replacement heifers for brucellosis (depending upon state) and all calves for clostridial diseases (blackleg, etc.) if they are a problem in your area.
2. If pinkeye is apt to be a problem, consider the following preventive and therapeutic measures.

#### Prevention:

- a. Make sure herd has been receiving adequate vitamin A.
- b. Vaccinate against IBR.
- c. Consider pinkeye vaccination.
- d. Control face flies.
- e. Clip grazed-over pastures so tall, coarse grasses do not irritate eyes.
- f. Provide ample shade.

#### Therapy:

- a. Administer an intramuscular injection of long-acting oxytetracycline (LA-200) when symptoms are first noticed.
  - b. Inject 1 cc antibiotic into the eyelid.
  - c. Shut out irritating sunlight by gluing patch over the eye with backtag cement or locking the animal in dark quarters.
3. If too many females return to heat, take a good look at:
    - a. Your bull;
    - b. Your cows' nutrition; and
    - c. Reproductive disorders such as IBR, leptospirosis, vibrio, haemophilus, cystic ovaries or uterine infection.
- Consult your veterinarian.

