

Angus Advisor

April Beef Cow Herd Management Tips

Upper Midwest Region

by Harlan Ritchie, Michigan State University

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. If you use artificial insemination (AI), order semen early, check your equipment and replace lost ID tags.
 - b. 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.
 - c. Consider a breeding soundness exam (BSE) for your bulls. Nationally, 10%-20% of the bulls are questionable or unsatisfactory breeders.
 - d. Make certain handling facilities are in good working order.
 - e. If lactating cows are thin and have not started to cycle, increase the plane of nutrition.
 - f. Yearling heifers should be fed to weigh at least 65% of their mature body weight by breeding season.
 - g. 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.
 - h. If IBR, BVD, leptospirosis, vibriosis or haemophilus are problems, vaccinate cows and heifers no later than three weeks prior to breeding season.

Southern Region

by R.S. Sand, University of Florida

1. Plant warm-season annual pastures.
2. Plant corn for silage.
3. Check and fill mineral feeder.

4. Check dust bags or apply treated ear tags.
5. Check for external parasites and treat if necessary.
6. Observe cows for repeat breeders.
7. Deworm cows as needed if not done in March.
8. Vaccinate against blackleg and brucellosis (Bang's disease) after 3 months of age and before 12 months of age.
9. Market cull cows and bulls.
10. Update market information and refine market strategy for calves.

Rocky Mountain West Region

by Doug Hixon, University of Wyoming

1. In most of this region, calving season is moving toward its end. However, the later calvers and newborns are still requiring considerable attention. Spring storms, from which calves will still need some protection, can hit in April.
2. Branding time will be approaching for early-born calves. Visit with your veterinarian about appropriate vaccinations and their best routes of administration. These generally include protection against clostridial diseases given subcutaneously, as well as a four-way vaccine giving protection from PI₃, IBR, BRSV and BVD. If a vaccine requires intramuscular (IM) administration, inject in neck region muscles in front of the shoulder. Commercial herds will also castrate bull calves at this time.
3. Cows can be more effectively protected against IBR, BVD, leptospirosis and vibriosis by using a modified-live vaccine after the cows have calved and before breeding season. A killed vaccine should be used if the cow is pregnant.
4. Monitor cow body condition and adjust feeding program accordingly. Extended periods of extremely cold temperatures with associated wind and moisture can cause loss of necessary body condition rapidly. This can extend the postpartum period to first estrus and delay subsequent conception.
5. Those who have potential grass tetany problems should supplement Mg through the mineral mix by adding approximately 30% magnesium oxide (MagOx) to your mineral supplement (see March tips). This will produce a supplement of about 18% Mg content. This high Mg level should be included

about one month prior to turnout on green grass and continue for one additional month after going on green, lush forage.

6. Continue to monitor yearling replacement heifer performance so they will reach their appropriate target weight prior to the time you want to breed them.
7. Yearling replacement heifers should have been Bang's vaccinated prior to a year of age. They should also receive an IBR, BVD, leptospirosis, vibriosis four-way, or a second-dose booster vaccination approximately one month prior to breeding. Check with your veterinarian about this and other potential problems in your area.
8. If you haven't already given it consideration, spend time planning your breeding program to produce next year's calf crop. Utilize expected progeny differences (EPDs) to make directional change for traits of economic importance. Balanced trait selection will tend to produce optimum-type cattle with more flexibility. Give special attention to birth weight EPD and calving ease when selecting bulls/semen to be used on first-calf heifers.
9. Consider conducting a BSE on all bulls to be used during the breeding season, especially newly acquired bulls if they were not tested prior to purchase.

Midwest Region

by Twig Marston, Kansas State University

April is a transition month for many spring-calving herds. Relief is spelled "g-r-e-e-n g-r-a-s-s."

Calving season

- Managing breeding season length will control calving season.
- Keep calving area as clean and dry as possible.
- Get colostrum into the calf as soon as possible (first 12-24 hours).

Herd nutrition

- Supplement and feed cows to maintain or improve body condition prior to the breeding season. Do not stop supplementing cows before grass is ready to handle the cows' nutrient requirements.
- Sort thin and young cows (2- and 3-year-olds) into separate management herds. Increases in energy and protein intakes may be needed to compensate for greater nutrient demands.
- Mineral supplementation should include greater levels of Mg (15-30 grams/head/day or at least 11% of the mineral mix) for grass tetany prevention.
- Bulls should be in good body condition prior to the breeding season. Thin bulls will run out of stamina.

Herd health

- A BSE is recommended for all bulls.
- Maintain top management concerning calf scours — sanitary conditions, early detection, electrolyte/dehydration therapy.
- Vaccinate calves for clostridial diseases. Dehorn and work calves prior to pasture turnout. Implant calves that will be sold at weaning.
- Delay fly control until critical numbers are reached (100-200 horn flies/animal).
- If cows are not gathered in the fall, now is the time (three weeks prior to breeding season) to vaccinate for reproductive diseases (consult with your veterinarian).
- Deworm cows and bulls if needed.

Forage/pasture management

- Use prescribed burning to eradicate cedars and improve forage quality.

- Fertilize cool-season pastures at locally recommended rate and according to soil tests.
- Check and maintain summer water supplies.

Reproductive management

- Palpate and score replacement heifers' reproductive tracts. Cull heifers with infantile tracts.
- Yearling weight of replacement heifers can be used to determine nutrition needed to achieve target breeding weight.
- Consider breeding heifers three weeks prior to the mature cow herd to give them a better chance to rebreed.
- Consider using MGA[®] and prostaglandin or some other estrous-synchronization program and AI to decrease calving difficulty and increase the value of next year's calf crop.

Genetic management

- When purchasing bulls, insist on performance records and EPDs on which to base selection criteria.
- Order semen and AI supplies well in advance. Check semen tanks for leakage.
- Record yearling weights and submit records to breed associations for genetic evaluation.

General management

- Record calving information permanently.
- Replace lost or worn ear tags.
- Good fences and good brands make good neighbors.
- Check equipment — sprayers, dust bags, oilers, haying equipment — and repair or replace as needed. Have spare parts on hand; downtime can make a difference in hay quality.

