

Consider these through-the-year management reminders

Here's a general checklist and prompter of some management considerations most breeders try to keep on top of, keep ahead of, in their planning. Local conditions and practices vary, of course. The producer should always enlist the support of county extension agents, area livestock specialists, veterinarians, and Association regional managers for specific advice.

We begin in January for spring calving situations and July for fall calving programs. . . .

Spring calves JANUARY/JULY Fall calves

CONSIDER:

Weighing your cattle if convenient. It's a good way to assess winter feeding rations or summer forage and the effectiveness of your feed and supplementation program. Weighing now gives you opportunity to assess cow/heifer condition and make modifications. Try not to "jostle" these expectant mothers too much. This is probably not a good time to work cattle through a squeeze chute and headgate, thereby inviting abortions.

Inspecting for lousiness if in a winter calving area, ticks if in an area prone to such in the South. Some managers spray at this time if weather permits, say during a "January thaw". Examine your spraying, pour-on, backrubbing chemicals closely. Read the labels and double-check with your veterinarian-treating for lice and especially grubs must be carried out in strict observance of calendar dates. Applying a grubicide at the wrong time of year can produce catastrophic results.

Sending in a forage analysis especially if you suspect there's some deficiency lurking. The majors-energy, protein, phosphorus, and vitamin A-need to be up to par, of course. Remember, micronutrients play a vital role in herd health and the utilization of some of these major components. It's a chain relationship, and the weak link can be the culprit.

Making every effort to separate heifers from cows so each can be fed separately. Splitting the mature cows from the cows expecting their second calf is a good practice. These new brood cows need special attention if they're to begin their career ahead of the demands placed upon them. It's important they establish a regular calving interval. Extra attention now will ensure they take their place as a contributing, efficient member of the herd.

Feeding replacement heifers to gain at a pound to a pound and a half per day now, say most experts. Mature size expected and fleshing condition must be considered. Bred heifers: perhaps a pound down to a half pound a day. A fat heifer is not necessarily sound nor will she calve any easier in that condition. Feed hearty after calving, but be cautious before. Mature cows in the last third of gestation can continue to be roughed along as their demands are modest at this time.

Arranging a procedure to be followed by employees or family members should signs signalling an abortion appear. Prompt mobilization of your veterinary/laboratory support could stave off an outbreak.

Devoting some time to planning the upcoming breeding season before your calving season consumes most of your herd management attention.

CHECK:

That salt and mineral feeders are functioning, sheltered if possible from the weather, and are tailored to providing those deficiencies common to your area.

That vitamin A can be fed or injected if your support team recommends. Your forage analysis will help spot shortages.

That your records reveal expected calving dates. Watch for signs among the earliest calvers.

That those who check the herd during this period be alert for the signs of abortion. Animals exhibiting heat or discharging from the vulva should be isolated. Prompt lab diagnosis of any specimens should be followed.

That the importance of water is emphasized. Five to 11 gallons per head per day in coldest weather; 13 to 20 gallons at the height of summer.

Spring calving FEBRUARY/AUGUST Fall calving

CONSIDER:

Preparing for grass tetany if turning on to small grain pastures. Magnesium supplementation is often a good standard practice whenever switching forage, especially if it's the least bit lush.

Monitoring the herd's supplementation program across the various ages and classes of cattle being fed. Watch cow condition closely. Expect to see mature cows gaining moderately to a thrifty condition.

Analyzing feed resources to start planning for lactation rations and amounts. Shop for and plan toward stockpiling some additional high quality hay, grain, or other supplement should your appraisal show you might be borderline.

Early calvers can surprise you, especially if there's a period of bad weather.

Inventory of supplies, medications, and tools in the calving shed. Your veterinarian can advise on what vaccines, electrolytes, and preventatives are new on the scene.

Laying in a supply of frozen colostrum from early calvers might ease an emergency later. A dairy might provide some.

Seeking advice to help decide if you need a final vaccination assault against leptospirosis or Clostridium perfringens. Your history, local experience, and vet's recommendations frame your decision.

CHECK:

That everyone on the family and employee team has reviewed the signs of normal and abnormal presentations and can operate calf pulling aids if need arises.

That the phone numbers of the veterinary clinics are posted prominently in the house, barn, or calving shed.

That some heat activity is evident among replacement heifers.

Spring calving MARCH/SEPTEMBER Fall calving

CONSIDER:

Keeping the calving area, whether a lot or shelter, as clean and dry as possible. Develop a rotation and disinfectant plan if you have a shed so the floor can be kept fresh for mothers coming into labor.

Extra attention for first calvers now.

Having a maternity ward pasture so cows and calves can be observed for a two or three day period, especially if the weather turns nasty. Make sure the calf is nursing.

Separating dry cows from those nursing new calves. It's difficult to feed or pasture both lactating and "drys" when they're mixed. Each has separate needs.

Planes of nutrition change quite dramatically as the herd advances from a dry herd to a nursing one. Check your nutrient tables and adjust your feeding to meet the challenges of lactating cows needing 100 percent more protein and 60 percent more energy typically. Energy is often the most limiting factor. Heavy milkers are prone to take it off their back and may even "overfeed" their calves.

Cows should gain 3/4 of a pound per day from calving through breeding. First calves generally need to add about a pound from calving through breeding. Develop a range of weights and gains tailored to your herd.

Establishing a routine for each calf as it's born. Make sure everyone on the team follows the procedure so newborn breathing, navel, colostrum, and comfort are dealt with.

Recording every possible item of the event, including the calves' statistics, the mothers' performance plus the sires' ease of calving.

Perking up pastures for the early spring or fall grazing. Fertilize on the basis of soil tests.

CHECK:

That the Association's record process is begun on each calf. Tattoo and eartag now if possible or timely.

That a chart and list of calving presentations and recording and health procedures is posted where they can be referred to or checked off.

That new mothers are rotated and checked on frequently through the various stations of the calving and maternity process. Be alert for scouring and have medications and a program ready if an outbreak should occur. Spring epidemics often flare up during and after spring storms or late blizzards.

Spring calving APRIL/OCTOBER Fall calving

CONSIDER:

Reviewing cow condition as calving season peaks. Noting when cows recycle will help signal adjustments to feeding, supplementation, and pasture rotations. Cows should be gaining at 3/4 pounds per day now and showing signs of heat three to four weeks after calving if they're in good health and "tone". Thin cows will extend postpartum out to 60 days or more before recycling. Heifers tend to have longer postpartum interval than cows.

Narrowing the replacement heifer package to help conserve resources as you begin planning for their breeding season.

Grass tetany, again as source of trouble, if turning on to early spring pastures or fall pastures that are still lush or immature. Phosphorus levels are quite important in getting cows ready to breed. Your feed supplier or county extension agent can advise the forms that have been found most available. Cheapest forms of phosphorus are not always bargains.

Researching your fly control program this year if in a spring calving area. What worked last year might not this summer. Regardless of your area, be aware flies can steal as much as 50 pounds off your calves.

Branding and/or tattooing is often practiced late in this period of the cycle.

Studying and challenging your whole approach to pasture. You might improve your management of this vital resource by more intensive mowing, fencing or cross-fencing, installing moveable electric fences, or improving water access. Attention to an intensive rotation program or reseeding grasses and legumes needs to be implemented now to bring these improvements on line for next year.

Examining your health program with your vet. Timing is important as you want to guard the herd against those diseases threatening rebreeding and early gestation. Cows that haven't calved are vulnerable to abortion if vaccinated with

Worming may be an appropriate practice in your area. Turning cattle out to graze usually invites parasitism. Southern areas experience a spring and fall surge of infestation. Local problems vary.

Finalizing your A.I. semen purchase.

CHECK:

That your herdsire or A.I. cleanup battery is semen tested and examined for breeding soundness.

That your grazing herds may be suffering from parasites if hair coats appear rough or mucous is present in the stool.

Spring calving MAY/NOVEMBER Fall calving

CONSIDER:

Getting those replacement heifers into breeding posture so they'll have one heat period before the bulk of the cows start showing estrus.

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Timing breeding so cows have a 60- to 80-day rest after calving and before conception. A 285-day gestation term and a 60-day rest allows her to recover, recycle, and enjoy 20-21 days leeway so the cow can maintain a consistent calving date. An estrous synchronization program is practiced by those breeders whose facilities and management can handle it.

Trying to bring all the influences on breeding success in line so a 45- to 60-day breeding season can be achieved. Repair and upgrade the A.I. chute and handling facility if you haven't already done so.

CHECK:

That the calves are vaccinated for the diseases prevalent in your area, especially the Clostridial family.

That your brucellosis (Bangs) vaccination program complies with state regulations.

That cow condition reveals the bulk of the herd is ready for rebreeding. "Bulling" should be observed.

That first-calf heifers are recovering and on the gain. They should be showing signs of heat as well.

That bloat guard blocks and grass tetany precautions are in place for those of you turning out on legume, legume mix, or green pastures that have been fertilized. No room for error here.

That the heat detection program is in place with heat detectors concentrating on late evening and early morning observation.

That heat detection pastures are provided with mineral, shelter, water, and driveways conducive to heat activity, cow comfort, and moving cattle easily.

That cattle might need worming.

Spring calving JUNE/DECEMBER Fall calving

CONSIDER:

Nutrition levels if cows are not settling. Other possibilities to sleuth are bulls and semen condition and reproductive disorders such as brought on by disease or infections.

Cutting off the breeding season for heifer replacements. Confining their breeding season to 45 days will cull sub-fertile heifers before they take up space in the herd, and it will save you an extended calving season.

Pasture management, creep feeding, rotations, mowing, and supplements are your tools now to extend and utilize the resources to their maximum potential. In the southern and fall calving areas, pasture assessment is important to allow recovery during this period of slower growth.

Monitoring fly control programs in a spring calving area and changing tags, relocating rubs, wicks, or dusters, or switching to different chemicals may be in order.

Creep feeding if you are comfortable with it, suffer from severe shortages of pasture or feed, or can justify the outlay because of a management or marketing need. Protein supplementation is probably not necessary.

Supplementing the cow if your area is in a crisis situation because of storms or drought.

CHECK:

That animals used as heat detectors (gomer bulls, etc.) are sound and interested in the job.

That chin-ball markers are functioning.

That cattle are getting bred and do not seem to be returning to heat.

That herd sires or cleanup bulls haven't been injured and are with the cows.

That fences are keeping the neighbors' bulls where they belong.

Spring calving JULY/JANUARY Fall calving

CONSIDER:

Removing bulls after a 60-day breeding season.

Taking inventory and anticipating your late summer, late winter pasture needs is important now. Planting a summer annual if land is available might be a quick short-lived solution for some, especially if it brings some idle ground into production by fall. Leasing arrangements should be pursued if possible in your area.

Trying to arrive at an estimation of winter hay production if in a spring calving situation.

CHECK:

That salt and mineral boxes are being utilized. Monitor consumption.

That water needs are being met especially if in the middle of summer.

That pastures are clipped so mature, stemmy grasses can be better utilized and that awns and stalks do not irritate.

That pinkeye, lameness, or poor-doing cows or calves are investigated and remedies undertaken.

That fly control devices are functioning and that the total program is working.

That any cow or heifer showing signs of heat be noted as a possible cull.

Spring calving AUGUST/FEBRUARY Fall calving

CONSIDER;

Closing out the breeding program for certain.

Planting some new pastures for the coming year.

Tallying your hay production if a spring calver so plans can be laid for the winter. Shortage may mean severe culling in the fall, arranging to buy second or third cutting "off the stump", finding some by-products for roughing the cows after weaning, or changing your marketing program.

Planning your winter and spring pasture program if a fall calver.

Attacking grubs usually begins in the late summer, early fall. Remember the "safe" date changes as you go north or south. Treating grubs past that date can threaten cattle with strangulation. Check your products and their application carefully.

August is height of fly season.

Spring calving SEPTEMBER/MARCH Fall calving

CONSIDER:

Weaning management. Try to set your projected date so it will harmonize with the 205-day figure used by AHIR and any state performance programs.

Separating bulls from heifers. Examine facilities for better management of these two groups.

Shipping cull cows.

Evaluating your herd replacements at this time for selection now or later.

Selecting cattle to be registered.

Getting ready for weaning time cattle work: weighing, sorting, retagging, tattooing, castration if not completed earlier, worming and other parasite control, any repeat or booster vaccinations, and weaning rations for bull and heifer calves.

CHECK:

That supplies, record materials, medications are on hand for work at weaning.

That extra pens and panels are available for sorting and confining. That scales and chutes are in repair.

Spring calving OCTOBER/APRIL Fall calving

CONSIDER:

Weaning when calves are seven to eight months. Some operations extend weaning out to nine or ten months if feed conditions or marketing program warrants.

Locking in a health and parasite program so all disease and parasite measures are followed for all classes of cows.

Worming cows as you preg test.

Pasturing dry, pregnant, mature cows on poor pasture, crop residues, or stalks.

Providing vitamin A for cows on dry grass. Some recommend vitamin D if cows will be confined in northern areas.

Studying heifer development rations by setting target weights and per pound daily gain needed to get there. If fall calving, your best pastures and attention to an inexpensive supplement should be devoted to bringing these herd replacements along.

Young bull rations may be tailored toward getting them bunk-broke and primed for any bull tests you may want to enter.

Alternate marketing possibilities for cull cows. Some breeders find putting a bit more bloom on culls brings a better return at the stockyard auction.

CHECK:

That records are carefully analyzed so loafing cows are culled and borderline cows are carefully measured against records.

That you've arranged for A.I. certificates for registering those A. I. calves.

That your fly control is up-to-date if fall calving in a southern area.

Spring calving NOVEMBER/MAY Fall calving

CONSIDER:

Weaning late calves unless your feed resources and other management practices favors extended nursing. Most late calves will do better on a ration designed for them rather than relying on their mothers.

Feeding replacement heifers on forage or hay so they hit 650 pounds at start of the breeding season. Avoid fattening.

Keeping dry, pregnant, mature cows on a maintenance diet until 90 days prior to calving when the level can be picked up gradually. Don't let them lose more than 10 percent of their weight taken or estimated at preg testing time.

Young cows should lose no weight from preg testing time to calving in most instances. Same for thin, mature cows who've milked heavy.

Adding weight moderately for the bred yearlings in the range of 100 to 125 pounds until calving time. Again, avoid fattening.

Taking inventory of winter feedstuffs and summer forage, saving the best for postpartum periods.

Spring calving DECEMBER/JUNE Fall calving

CONSIDER:

Feeding smartly as your biggest challenge now. Cows being roughed should be supplemented if severe, prolonged storms and declining pastures or hay quality could accelerate weight loss.

Sorting cattle finer as feed supplies become more limited or offer greater variety in southern areas. Highest quality continues to go to young stock and replacements.

Evaluating herd sire condition and feed accordingly so gains are modest. Consider retaining those bulls whose calves appear promising and that posted good weaning records.

Computing a score based on pounds of calf weaned per cows exposed. Also, pounds of calf weaned as a percentage of cow weight is a useful measure of cow and herd efficiency.

CHECK:

That cattle are free from lice in the northern areas.

That herd sires are sound on feet and legs. Check all stock particularly older cows for lameness.

That fly control program is working in southern regions.