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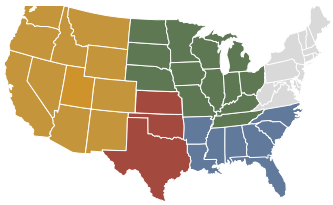
Our team of Angus advisors offer regional tips for herd management.



Southern Great Plains

by David Lalman
Oklahoma State University
david.lalman@okstate.edu

Some parts of the Southern Great Plains remain in moderate to severe drought according to the National Drought Mitigation Center. The good news is that water supplies and forage inventory have been (somewhat) replenished in a good portion of the region.

Without question, the entire region has suffered through intense heat this past summer. Conditions suggest special attention should be given to the vitamin and mineral nutrition program, as vitamin A will be very low in most forages. Secondly, don't scrimp on breeding soundness evaluations (sometimes referred to as BSE) for herd sires prior to this year's fall breeding season.

A few additional management reminders to consider early this fall:

Spring-calving herds

Due to rapidly declining forage quality in the southern Great Plains, October represents the latest practical time to wean in most seedstock operations. Calves should be individually weighed, initial or booster vaccinations administered, and other timely herd health management steps completed.

Individually weigh, condition score and preg-check cows and bred heifers. Remember cow body weight and body condition score (BCS) data should be recorded within 45 days of calf weaning weight data.

BCS is a critical component in the mature cow weight expected progeny difference (EPD). This information is increasingly important, as the beef industry strives to improve cow efficiency and optimize mature cow size for different environments. BCS is a subjective measure, therefore it is important for producers to fine-tune their skills and "calibrate" their scores once in a while.

One unit of body condition change should be associated with about 7.1% of the cow's body weight change. For example, if a cow weighs 1,300 pounds (lb.) at weaning with a BCS of 6, you would expect her to lose about 92 lb. at a BCS of 5 or gain about 92 lb. at a BCS of 7.

Producers should cull females that are open this fall. Research has shown retained open cows average about 60% pregnancy rate going forward. Report whole-herd records to the Association office.

Treat cows and calves for internal and external parasites. Be aware internal parasites are becoming increasingly resistant to some deworming products. Thus, it is a good idea to discuss product selection with your veterinarian. Deworming is best timed after the first killing frost, although many understandably do this at the time of weaning since the cattle are gathered. Check with your veterinarian.

If your spring-calving cows are marginal in body condition, wean calves as early as possible. Similarly, assuming a native rangeland forage base, begin protein supplementation as early as possible. These two management steps should allow cows to gain about one full BCS before the first of the year.

Fall-calving herds

Closely monitor late-calving heifers, as the frequency of calving difficulty may be higher in heifers that have experienced long gestation periods.

Work with your veterinarian to develop or review your branding-time herd health plan, and purchase products needed to execute the protocol.

Prepare for the breeding season by purchasing semen and other breeding supplies, testing your breeding equipment and getting synchronization protocol steps on the calendar.

With intense summer heat, it is important to conduct a breeding soundness exam on herd bulls prior to the fall breeding season.

If possible, ask to see the dams (and their records) of bulls you are interested in purchasing, whether for use in natural matings or artificial insemination (AI). Selection for udder quality, foot structure, docility and a long history of reproductive success begins with bull and semen purchases. EPDs are available for foot structure, docility and heifer pregnancy.

Western Region

by Zach McFarlane
California Polytechnic State University
smcfarla@calpoly.edu

As fall quickly approaches, California beef producers are gearing up for the fall bull sale season. Those of you managing for a fall calving season are looking ahead to breeding. As such, there are several important management factors to bear in mind as you prepare.

Regardless of your breeding season start time, you are likely thinking about what bulls to keep or cull. As these bulls are such an important part of your herd genetic foundation, it is imperative you select the right bulls for your operation.

However, do not forget the management of your bulls after purchase and for the rest of their productive lifetime is just as important as your selection decisions.

Bull selection and management should be at the forefront of your mind, because bulls are the primary source of new genetics in the herd. Therefore, special attention must be paid to finding the right bull(s) that fit your needs. Regardless of your genetic needs, fertility and structural soundness are imperative for breeding season success. It is recommended to evaluate bulls in-person, if possible, and use all tools available for selection.

A combination of phenotype and genotype is important for making your final selection, and it is important to balance traits instead of focusing on a single trait. Single-trait selection can inhibit genetic progress, so do not just focus on convenience traits. Instead, focus on traits that will make your calf crop more marketable and profitable down the road.

Breed associations have taken steps to help with these multi-trait selection decisions by creating various EPD dollar index values that can provide positive directional changes in desired traits. Whether you are looking for maternal genetic value or carcass-focused genetics, there are EPDs available to help with this selection decision.

But what happens once you purchase that bull? How do you manage the bull before the breeding season? Regardless of the method, such as turning out in a bull pasture to harden bulls up in preparation, you should also focus on conducting a breeding soundness exam.

The USDA National Animal Health and Monitoring System (NAHMS) conducted a survey of cow-calf producers in 2017 that indicated that an average of only 19.5% of producers conduct a breeding soundness exam. This disturbing statistic is similar to a survey conducted in California where 22% of bull buyers never conducted a semen evaluation after purchasing a bull. Even though bulls may be fertile prior to the sale, this does not mean the bull will not have fertility problems down the road.

A semen quality evaluation is just a snapshot in time. The spermatogenesis cycle, or the production of new and mature sperm cells, takes approximately 61 days. Therefore, a general recommendation is to conduct a breeding soundness exam at least 30-60 days prior to the date of bull turnout.

A breeding soundness exam is critical to protect your investment and the future of your calf crop. Your veterinarian can provide a thorough evaluation of all factors of fertility, which do not solely focus on semen quality. A breeding soundness exam includes a physical examination of overall health (e.g., feet and structural soundness, clearness of eyes, etc.); palpation of the testes and accessory sex glands (e.g., prostate); measurement of scrotal circumference; as well as semen collection and analysis of sperm cell motility, morphology and concentration.

The Society of Theriogenology sets minimum standards for bulls to "pass" a breeding soundness exam, which included the following: non-compromised soundness of structure and limbs, no eye problems, no lameness, meet the minimum threshold of scrotal circumference for their age group, minimum 30% progressive motility of sperm, and minimum 70% morphologically normal sperm.

Along with this, it is recommended a veterinarian test for venereal disease. This is especially important for bulls that breed multiple cow herds or are leased. Testing for trichomoniasis is recommended to prevent infection from cow to bull, or vice versa. At minimum, your bull should have a breeding soundness

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exam conducted annually, especially if you are bringing in new sources of cattle with unknown health backgrounds.

It is also important to consider the workload of a bull. Bulls that must cover ground and breed multiple breeding seasons may have difficulty coping with physical activity and nutritional stress. Bulls can often lose more than 200 lb. during the breeding season, and young bulls may not recover in time for the subsequent breeding season without proper supplementation strategies. Bulls are often overly conditioned because "fat sells," but this can lead to fertility problems in the long term. Several researchers have demonstrated the negative semen quality effects of overconditioning bulls.

Pedro Fontes at the University of Georgia will be discussing this topic at the Applied Reproductive Strategies in Beef Cattle in September. I would encourage you to follow this group's spectacular website and social media platforms to access talks from industry experts.

These are just a few factors to consider for bull management. Although we often pay special to attention our females when it comes to reproductive management, we cannot forget our bulls.

As always, be well and God bless the American rancher.

Southeast Region

by Jason Duggin
University of Georgia
jduggin@uga.edu

It's calf marketing season for many, and the cattle trucking industry is an essential part that is sometimes overlooked or under appreciated. Good trucking companies and, likewise, good truckers, aid producers in delivering quality cattle that are ready to transition to the next step of the industry, and they need our support. Here are some challenges the cattle trucking industry faces.

Cost of equipment: Truck and trailer = $315,000-$330,000

Cost of insurance: Premium (with cattle coverage) = $12,000-$15,000 annually per truck

Lack of mechanics for older trucks: Truckers are often forced to purchase new trucks to receive warranty and service.

Truck issues: Often, it can take 10 days to get a truck into the shop, and it will usually be another 10 days in the shop.

Lack of qualified drivers: The cattle trucking industry is starved for qualified cattle truckers who can stay in the business for more than two years. If ticketed for an overweight load, truckers are deemed unsafe drivers by the insurance company, increasing premiums from $12,000 up to $25,000.

Cattle trucking in the Southeast is more challenging and less profitable compared to west of the Mississippi river. The traffic, increased time frame, wear and tear on the rig, and infrequency of loads and back hauls all make for headaches that cost trucking companies decreased revenue and drivers more headaches.

Fluctuation in Fuel Cost: If the trucker bids a job and the cost of diesel increases $0.20 the next week, the trucker is often forced to absorb the increased overhead. The average cost of fuel, as of this writing, is $0.75 a mile for a 1,000-mile trip.

Running 65 mph is more profitable than 75 mph, and a reduction in 10 mph improves fuel efficiency (mpg) by one gallon. This can add up to thousands of dollars per truck, per year. Arguably, it's also better for the cattle.

Cattle truck drivers are a dying breed, and as you might expect, there are very few young people interested in entering the business. Other things to consider when hiring a trucking company include:

- Will the trucker arrive in an acceptable time window?
- Are the truck and trailer clean?
- Do they know how to properly

load to minimize shrink and the possibility of a rollover?
- Will your cattle arrive in the estimated time window without extreme shrink?
- Will they answer my phone call next year? If not, I may be left dealing with whoever I can get last minute.
- Is going with the lowest cost bidder worth my piece of mind on a load of cattle worth more than $100,000?

Cattle truckers are an essential link to the beef cattle industry. To the drivers and business owners who work hard to do it the right way — thank you for all you do.

Thank you to Brain and Rebecca Penland, owners of C and E Trucking, for their contribution.

Midwest Region

by Eric Bailey

University of Missouri
baileyeric@missouri.edu

When is the last time you thought about the carrying capacity of your land? Is it better for your business in the long run to substitute equipment, fuel and labor for additional acres?

These questions have been on my mind during the last few months as drought has affected Missouri. Certainly, they're not making any more land, and there is plenty competition from nonagricultural entities (recreational use, housing, etc.). However, a business that is short on land (overstocked) is vulnerable during periods of drought.

Cattle prices have hit levels not seen in 10 years, but much of Missouri and the broader region have experienced drought. Right now, a round bale of grass hay is hard to find for less than $100, and there is plenty of hay being shipped in from other states. I have seen local fescue hay go for $120-$150 per bale.

Let's assume that bale is 1,000 lb., and a cow is going to eat (including waste) 30 lb. of hay. Consider this: your hay costs per cow per day currently fluctuate between $3.60 and $4.50, and this hay may also lack the necessary energy content to maintain body condition.

Commercial cow-calf operations do not generate enough revenue to support $4-$5 per cow per day feed costs. This is a scorching hot take, but I am convinced most commercial cow-calf operations in this country would be more profitable with 5-10% fewer cows than they have right now.

According to experts at Ranching for Profit, the No. 1 predictor of profitability in commercial cow-calf production is the number of days spent feeding hay during the winter. When carrying capacity and cow inventories become misaligned, producers find themselves compelled to seek additional forage off-farm.

On the flip side of this argument, we should ask: what stocking rate would be required for year-round grazing? I suspect the answer to that question would not be well received in areas accustomed to feeding hay for 90-120 days per year.

I'm not suggesting selling all your equipment and cutting your cow herd in half, but let's consider the earlier example of winter hay feeding with $150-per-bale hay. If you're consistently feeding hay more than 100 days each winter and nervous about winter feed supplies more often than not, it is time to ask if your forage base is adequate to support your current cow inventory.

One could accuse me of being "hay-phobic," and in some regards, I am. The operation I was raised on grazed 365 days per year, not by choice. Importing large quantities of hay into eastern New Mexico is an expensive endeavor. This is the point. Even if you cut your own hay, by the time it ends up in a cow's mouth, it will cost two to three times as much as when a cow harvests it herself.

Do we need hay for emergency situations? Absolutely. We kept one to two semi loads of hay in the barn at all times as an insurance policy.

As we plan for the future, let's rely on economics rather than "EGOnomics" — that is, the tendency to make decisions based on ego-driven desires, such as owning a specific number of cows, rather than determining the optimal herd size based on our resource base. If your forage base is inadequate and you have money to spend before year's end due to drought-induced culling, investing in fencing and water infrastructure will pay dividends in the long run.

Those who are not currently practicing some kind of management-intensive grazing will see an increase in the proportion of forage grown that ends up in a cow's mouth and will increase carrying capacity. Your operation will be better together when the forage base and the livestock are in sync. AJ