

Angus Advisor

October Beef Cow Herd Management Tips

Upper Midwest Region

by Harlan Ritchie, Extension Beef Specialist
Michigan State University

- For many herds it's time for fall roundup and processing, which includes:
 - ✓ Weaning the calf crop;
 - ✓ Selecting replacement-heifer calves;
 - ✓ Vaccinating retained heifer and bull calves;
 - ✓ Treating the entire herd for internal and external parasites;
 - ✓ Pregnancy testing and culling open cows; and
 - ✓ Culling problem cows and marginal producers.
- Consult your veterinarian for a replacement-heifer vaccination program that fits your needs. One proven to be applicable to many operations includes:
 - ✓ IBR (infectious bovine rhinotracheitis), also known as "red nose";
 - ✓ PI₃ (parainfluenza);
 - ✓ BVD (bovine viral diarrhea);
 - ✓ BRSV (bovine respiratory syncytial virus);
 - ✓ seven-way clostridial;
 - ✓ *Haemophilus somnus*;
 - ✓ five-strain leptospirosis;
 - ✓ *Campylobacter fetus* (vibriosis); and
 - ✓ Brucellosis (Bang's disease).
- Except for brucellosis, these same vaccines can be administered to retained bull calves.
- Ideally, these vaccinations should be given three to four weeks prior to weaning. A round of booster shots should be given at weaning or shortly thereafter.
- If you vaccinate cattle yourself, be sure you know how to handle vaccines. Modified-live virus (MLV) products are easily inactivated by heat, light and contamination with alcohol or water. Use them up in one to two hours.
- Select weaning-age replacement heifers on expected progeny differences (EPDs), individual performance records and functional traits such as structural soundness, temperament, fleshing ability and muscle thickness. To maintain herd

size, retain 33%-50% of the heifer crop at weaning time.

- Fall is a good time to take soil tests and to top-dress hay and pasture fields with potassium and phosphorus as needed.

Rocky Mountain West Region

by Doug Hixon, Extension Beef Specialist
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- It's weaning time in the majority of this region. Preferably, bull, steer and heifer calves have been administered vaccines to offer protection against IBR, PI₃, BVD, seven strains of clostridia, BRSV, five strains of leptospirosis, and *Haemophilus somnus* three to four weeks prior to weaning. Consult your local veterinarian for specific vaccination needs in your area. Follow label instructions for proper storage and administration of vaccines.
- A series of booster vaccinations might be appropriate at weaning or shortly thereafter. At least three weeks should separate initial and booster vaccinations. Again, consult your local veterinarian on the most appropriate schedule.
- Vaccine administration deserves another comment. Use the subcutaneous (sub-Q) route of administration whenever the label suggests it as an allowable route. Intramuscular (IM) injections can cause injection-site blemishes that may show up years later when an old cow is salvaged. If IM administration is required, give it in the neck muscles where it won't affect higher-priced carcass cuts at a later time. Contact your state beef council or Cooperative Extension Service for approved beef quality assurance (BQA) procedures.
- Collect weaning-weight data on your entire calf crop for submission to your breed association, making sure you accurately identify contemporary groups. The current Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) guidelines define contemporary groups as cattle of similar age (within 90 days) that are of the same breed (or breed combinations) and sex, and that have been raised in the same management group.
- Postweaning management of newly weaned calves should attempt to reduce stress as much as possible.

Calves will usually eat a high-quality grass hay but also should be offered a grain concentrate (20%-30% of dry-matter intake) to supply adequate energy during this stressful period.

- If you replace 10%-15% of your cow herd annually, you might start the replacement process by keeping up to 50% of your heifer calves at weaning time, depending on available feed resources and the associated development costs. This will allow future fine-tuning or culling prior to breeding with final decisions made when they are pregnancy-checked next fall. Prioritize your selection process, giving consideration to expected progeny differences (EPDs), individual performance and functional traits, such as structural soundness, disposition and fleshing ability.
- Give thought to winter nutrition programs for all classes of cattle, building around homegrown forages and available crop residues.
- Dry, standing range is a good, cheap source of energy at this time of year when the spring-calving, nonlactating beef cow is in mid-gestation and her nutritional needs are at their lowest. However, it's generally low in protein. A natural source of protein supplement may enhance forage intake and digestibility, and ultimately body condition, prior to the onset of severe winter weather. Meadow regrowth also can be used to supply higher protein levels.
- Have a veterinarian analyze fecal samples on approximately 5%-10% of the cows for internal parasite egg counts if cows or calves have had access to irrigated pastures. Egg counts aren't perfect but are probably the best indicator of parasite load other than samples taken during necropsy when an animal dies. Internal parasites are typically not a problem in cows extensively managed on native range, but there may be exceptions to this situation.
- Remove insecticide ear tags after the first hard freeze in the fall to help prevent development of resistance.

Midwest Region

by Twig Marston, Extension Beef Specialist
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Cow-herd management

- Pregnancy check.
- Cull cows based on these criteria:
 - Open;
 - Late vs. early calving;
 - Soundness — udder, feet and legs, eyes, teeth, disposition;
 - Productivity — most probable producing ability (from herd performance records); and
 - Disposition.

3. Provide thin cows (body condition score [BCS] 3-4) extra feed now. Take advantage of weather, stage of pregnancy, lower nutrient requirements and quality feedstuffs.
4. In late October you may start feeding supplement to mature cows using these guidelines:
 - Dry grass — Provide 1-2 pounds (lb.)/day of a 40% crude protein (CP) supplement;
 - Dry grass — 3-4 lb./day of a 20% supplement; or
 - Dry grass and 10 lb. good nonlegume hay — no supplement needed.
 Heifers may need more supplement than older cows. Supplement nutrients that are most deficient, and compare supplements on the basis of cost per pound of nutrient.
5. Control external and internal parasites when needed; consult with your county agent, veterinarian and support-industry representatives.
6. Check individual identification (ID) of cows. Replace lost tags or redo brands.
7. Utilize crop residues:
 - Strip-graze or rotate fields to improve grazing efficiency; and
 - Cows of average body condition can be grazed at 1-2 acres/cow for 30 days, assuming normal weather.
8. Consider feeding cull cows to increase value and body weight and to utilize cheap feedstuffs.
9. Vaccinate cows per veterinarian's recommendations.

Calf management

1. Wean calves using the following guidelines:
 - Reduce stress by providing a clean, dust-free, comfortable environment;
 - Provide a balanced nutritional program to promote weight gain and health;
 - Observe feed and water intake. Healthy, problem-free calves have good appetites and drink adequate amounts of water;
 - Observe calves frequently. Early detection of sickness reduces medical costs and lost performance;
 - Vaccinate calves, and control internal and external parasites with veterinary consultation (ideally done prior to weaning);
 - Vaccinate all replacement-heifer candidates for brucellosis if 4-10 months of age; and

- Use implants and feed additives to improve efficient animal performance.
2. Weigh all calves individually. This allows for correct sorting, herd culling, growing programs, replacement-heifer selection and marketing plans.
 3. Participate in national-level breed-association performance programs, CHAPS or other ranch-record systems.
 4. Finalize plans to merchandise calves or to background through yearling or finishing programs. Consider feedstuff availability, and realize that limit-feeding high-concentrate diets may be a profitable feeding program.
 5. Select replacement heifers on these criteria:
 - Born early in the calving season. This should increase the number of yearling heifers bred during the early days of the subsequent breeding season;
 - Daughters of above-average-producing cows. Performance traits are moderately heritable;
 - Of the proper frame size to complement the desired mature size and weight; and
 - Structurally correct. Avoid breeding udder, feet and leg problems into your herd.
 6. Vaccinate replacement heifers with a first round of viral vaccines.
 7. Plan a replacement-heifer nutrition program so heifers will be at their target weight (65% of their mature weight) by the start of the breeding season.
4. Plan your marketing program, including private-treaty, consignment, test-station and production sales.
 5. A penny saved is a penny earned. Price byproducts, grains and other feedstuffs on a nutrient basis.

Southern Region

*by R.S. Sand, Extension Beef Specialist
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1. Plant cool-season legumes.
2. Plant small-grain pastures.
3. Check mineral feeders.
4. Check for external parasites, especially lice. Treat if needed.
5. Check for spittlebugs. Treat if needed.
6. Watch the condition of your cow herd. Maintain adequate nutrition.
7. Isolate any additions to the herd for 30-60 days and observe for signs of disease. Retest for brucellosis and leptospirosis.
8. Be sure you have adequate handling facilities that are in good working order.



Forage and pasture management

1. Observe weed problems to assist in planning control methods needed next spring for pastures.
2. Monitor grazing conditions and rotate pastures if possible and practical.
3. Plan winter nutritional program through pasture and forage management.
4. For stocker cattle and replacement heifers, supplement maturing grasses with an acceptable degradable intake protein or ionophore (feed additive) supplement.

General management

1. Avoid unnecessary stress. Handle cows and calves to reduce shrink, to sustain good health and to minimize sickness.
2. Analyze forages for nitrate and nutrient content. Use these to develop winter feeding programs.
3. Repair, replace and improve facilities.