ANGUS ADVISOR

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

Southern Great Plains

by David Lalman

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Spring-calving herds

Be prepared to adjust the nutritional program as necessary to keep cows from losing weight and body condition ahead of late-winter/spring calving.

Mature cows should be in a minimum body condition score (BCS) of 5 and first-calf heifers in a minimum BCS of 6 by calving.

Nutritional management adjustments might include moving cows to ungrazed stockpiled pasture, increasing concentrate supplementation, initiating hay feeding or providing limited access to cool-season annual forage (wheat, rye, ryegrass, etc.).

Similarly, during December or early January, virgin heifers should be checked for weight gain and compared to your established target weight goal.

The nutritional program can then be adjusted to accommodate slower or faster rate of gain.

Fall-calving herds

In spring-calving herds, the nutritional goal in December is generally to maintain good body condition in cows prior to calving.

However, in lactating fall-calving cows, the goal usually becomes limiting weight loss prior to the end of the breeding season because too rapid weight loss extends the postpartum interval and reduces conception rates.

Three to 6 pounds (lb.) of a concentrate supplement, along with 5-10 lb. of high-quality legume hay or silage should maintain weight, body condition and milk production in most situations.

Limited access to small-grains pasture is an excellent winter supplementation program for fall-calving cows.

Access to small-grains pasture should be limited to about 20-30% of actual grazing time.

Provide a high-calcium, high-magnesium mineral supplement to lactating cows grazing out on small-grains forage.

Creep-feeding is more frequently economical in fall-calving programs because grazed forage quality is low, resulting in more efficient conversion of creep feed to calf weight gain. Remember to report creep-fed calves as a separate contemporary group.

General recommendations

Graze native hay meadows (that were harvested in early to mid-July) after a hard frost.

Winter grazing and burning hay meadows helps to improve hay quality the following year and suppresses brush encroachment around the edges of the field.

Before the end of the year, check your financial management plan and projected tax situation in case income or expense adjustments are necessary to minimize your tax burden.

Western Region

by Randy C. Perry

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Spring-calving herds

Prepare for the calving season.

Although the start of the breeding period is still months away, start considering potential artificial insemination (AI) sire selections.

If any pre-calving vaccinations are going to be administered such as a scour vaccine, they should be given far enough in advance of the calving season to avoid handling cows that are close to parturition.

Be sure equipment is in working order and supplies are on hand to assist females once calving starts.

Be sure cows are receiving adequate levels of calcium, phosphorus and trace minerals that are deficient in your area.

The target level of body condition at calving is a minimum BCS of 5 for mature cows and 6 for 2-yr-old heifers on a scale of 1 to 9.

Both protein and energy requirements need to be met to achieve the desired body condition at the start of the calving season.

The developmental period from weaning until yearling time is critical in terms of influencing the future productivity of both bulls and heifers. Avoid overfeeding bulls or heifers as excessive fat deposition can hinder structural soundness and

reproductive performance.

Normally the first month following weaning is the most challenging in terms of respiratory disease in calves. That point should have passed by now. If calves are going to be PI-BVD tested or vaccinated for anaplasmosis using the one-shot live vaccine, you should get those samples collected and vaccinations administered.

Fall-calving herds

Main focus — the breeding season.

If estrus synchronization is going to be used, a protocol should have been selected and products should be on hand. Take extra time in administering synchronization products being sure to prevent injection site leak back.

Many synchronization protocols offer timed artificial insemination (TAI). Many use systems that combine limited heat detection and use TAI on the females that don't exhibit estrus. Protocols recommended by the Beef Reproduction Task Force are printed in almost every single major AI Beef Sire Directory.

Put extra effort into heat detection, because oftentimes it is the difference-maker between average and highly successful AI programs.

Take time to be precise with all details concerning semen handling and placement. If you are breeding AI for more than one cycle, inject GnRH at the time of repeat inseminations.

Bulls should be semen checked and trichomoniasis tested and ready for use from a physical standpoint. In addition, they should be in the proper degree of body condition and should have been vaccinated at least one month prior to turnout date.

Be sure females are receiving adequate levels of calcium, phosphorus and trace minerals deficient in your area. Mineral supplementation is most important during the breeding season. We prefer to use supplements that include chelated products, especially during the breeding season.

Continue to monitor BCS of breeding females. The target level of BCS is 5.0 (scale = 1 to 9) for both cows and heifers. Ideally, this level of body condition should be maintained during the entire breeding season.

Be certain that both protein and energy requirements of females are being met. Because energy balance has a major influence on fertility, have females in a state of positive energy balance (gaining weight) during the breeding season.

If females are grazing dry native forage, fall and winter is when protein supplementation is most important. Price supplements on a cost per pound of protein.

Treat calves for either scours or pneumonia promptly. It is advised to have first and second treatment options for both conditions.

Midwest Region

by Eric Bailey

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General comments

Beef producers are beginning to feed supplements to cattle on pasture this winter; and the number of producers expressing a reluctance to use grain, pellets or cubes as a supplement surprises me. The most common complaint is the labor of putting supplement out; many are using buckets to provide feed. Safety while feeding cattle is also cited as a major concern. In other parts of the country, cake feeders mounted on flatbed pickups are used to alleviate this concern. Not every operation needs to invest in a pickup, flatbed, and a cake feeder, especially in this part of the country, where the average herd size is about 35 cows.

Cake feeders are mobile feeders designed to dispense grain, pellets or cubes to livestock from a moving vehicle or UTV. Most contain an auger or chain in the bottom to move feed out a chute and allow for stringing a line of feed. Cake boxes made for UTVs will hold 500-600 lb. of feed and cost around $1,500. These feeders allow you to stay in the vehicle and away from the hungry cows.

Some cake feeders have scales, but this is largely unnecessary if you are willing to calibrate the feeder periodically. Calibrating a feeder involves dispensing feed for a set period of time (10 seconds) into a container, then weighing the feed dispensed. If a feeder dispenses 50 lb. of feed in 10 seconds, then the feeder dispenses 5 lb. of feed per second. If you need to put out 250 lb. of supplement to you cows, then run the feeder for a total of 50 seconds.

Cake feeders can dispense various types of feed, but this is determined by the way feed is dispensed. Earlier designs were made for ¾-inch range cubes. Now, designs allow for feeding of smaller pellets (¼-inch) or even meal-type feeds (distillers' grains).

I see a tremendous benefit for producers who might be reluctant to supplement cows during the winter. This feeding system is not intended to replace the use of hay during times of inadequate pasture forage, but allows producers to improve the nutrient content of beef cattle diets when poor quality (<7% crude protein or <50%TDN) feeds are used. A cake feeder mounted on a UTV may be the answer to reducing labor and improving the safety of feeding pasture cattle this winter. AJ

Disclaimer: Comments are not intended to promote individual brands or styles of cake feeders. This is for informational purposes only.