



Angus Advisor

► MARCH herd management tips

Southern Region

by Jane Parish, Mississippi State University,
jparish@ads.msstate.edu

General recommendations

Nutritional management. With relatively high feed costs, it may be tempting to rough cattle through the remainder of the winter feeding period on less-than-optimum nutrition. This approach can cost the operation in cattle reproductive and growth performance.

Areas of the region still feeling the effects of drought should pay special attention to grazing management for adequate pasture recovery to take place this spring. Maintain at least a 4-inch (in.) average stubble height on winter annuals to avoid overgrazing. Temporary, portable electric fencing is an excellent tool for implementing rotational grazing, limit-grazing, strip-grazing or creep-grazing systems.

Fertilize cool-season grasses according to soil tests if not done earlier this year. Again, high fertilizer costs may deter some producers from applying needed fertilizer, but consider the effect of the lack of or reduced rate of fertilizers on forage productivity and pasture nutrient profiles. Planning for incorporation of legumes such as white clover into forage systems is prudent for reducing nitrogen (N) fertilizer needs and improving forage quality. Locate hybrid Bermuda grass sprig supplies for planting

starting next month. Spray little barley, buttercup and other winter annual weeds while still vegetative for better control.

Watch for grass tetany, particularly on lactating cows grazing lush pastures such as tall fescue or annual ryegrass. Feed a high-magnesium [at least 10% magnesium (Mg)] mineral supplement to cows and heifers on these high-quality pastures. Provide proper mineral supplementation and fresh water at all times. Make plans to service forage-harvesting equipment well before hay season.

Health management. Plan summer fly control before the fly population builds in the warmer months ahead. Consider options for anaplasmosis control in the coming months, and develop a complete herd health program in consultation with a veterinarian. Practices consistent with Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) should be included in the health program. Vaccinate all calves more than three months old for blackleg. Check with a veterinarian for state guidelines on calffood Bang's (brucellosis) vaccination programs for heifers.

Secure a premises identification number (PIN) for your farm or ranch from your state veterinarian's office if you have not already done so. This is a key component of disease and disaster preparedness for beef cattle operations throughout the entire region. Work to develop a ranch-level disease and disaster plan. Your local Extension educator and veterinarian can assist in these planning efforts.

Marketing and financial management.

Consider marketing cull cows in good condition. Cull-cow markets are typically favorable in the next few months compared to the rest of the year. Small-scale producers, in particular, may benefit from forming alliances with neighbors for group cattle marketing and bulk input-purchase endeavors.

Continue good production and financial recordkeeping. With escalating input prices, enterprise budgeting and cash-flow analyses are worthwhile exercises. The information from these budgets and reports can be used to make knowledgeable production and marketing decisions.

Finish tax returns this month to avoid last-minute preparation stress. Drought-related sales of livestock should be addressed in tax returns. Visit with an Extension service office or tax professional for assistance with these issues.

Spring-calving herds

Calving and breeding management.

Calving season is likely well under way, and calving supplies should be readily available. Dip navels and identify, weigh, castrate and implant calves at birth as appropriate. Calving records should include calving ease scores and dam body condition at calving.

Acquire quality herd sires with performance information from reputable sources. Obtain detailed information on bull genetics, health program and customer-service offerings on prospective herd sires. Then take time to study this information to make informed decisions on bull selection. Make sure that calving-ease sires are selected for breeding to heifers. Conduct breeding soundness exams (sometimes referred to as a BSE), and make sure bulls are in good condition in advance of spring breeding. Provide additional nutrients to bulls if needed.

For artificial insemination (AI) programs, have ample semen and other needed supplies on hand and facilities in shape for breeding. Vaccinate all open cows and heifers for vibriosis, leptospirosis and infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) at least 30 days before breeding. Consult with a veterinarian for bovine viral diarrhea (BVD) recommendations for the local area. Start breeding heifers about a month before the cow herd.

Parish joins advisor team

Jane Parish is a native of northeast Texas and was active in showing livestock in FFA as a youth. She earned a bachelor's degree in animal science and agricultural economics from Texas A&M University (TAMU) at College Station, a master's degree in agricultural and applied economics from Texas Tech University (Texas Tech) at Lubbock, and a doctorate in animal science with an emphasis in beef cattle forage systems from the University of Georgia (UGA).

Parish is highly involved with beef cattle associations, serving as secretary and advisor for the Mississippi Beef Cattle Improvement Association (MBCIA) and as advisor for the Mississippi State University (MSU) Collegiate Cattlemen's Club.

She is currently an associate professor and Extension beef cattle specialist in the Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences at MSU. Parish supervises management of the beef cattle research herds that include Angus, Charolais and Hereford cattle at the Leveck Animal Research Center on the MSU campus. In addition, she is involved with her husband, Jimmy Ray, in Clear Water Cattle, a purebred Charolais operation in Aberdeen, Miss.

Editor's Note: Jane Parish is the new advisor for the Southern Region, succeeding John Hall, who has taken a position in another region of the country.



Jane Parish

Nutritional management. Place cattle with the highest nutritional needs (growing cattle, lactating first-calf heifers and cows) on the highest-quality grazing and hay. Supplement the cow herd as needed according to forage test results. Cows need to be in moderate to good condition [at least a body condition score (BCS) of 5 on a 9-point scale] to rebreed early. (For information on how to score cows for condition, visit www.cowbcs.info.)

Fall-calving herds

Breeding management. If bulls are not already put up, then remove bulls 283 days prior to the end of the desired calving season (early March to end the calving season in mid-December, and mid-March to end the calving season in late December). Keep bulls in small pasture traps with effective fences, and manage bulls to start the next breeding season in good condition. Observe the cow herd for returns to standing heat. Schedule pregnancy-checks for 45-60 days after the end of the breeding season or earlier if using ultrasound technology to determine pregnancy.

Calf management. Castrate and dehorn late calves or those missed in early working. For calves born in an early-fall season, consider whether or not early weaning in late-March or April fits operational goals. Fenceline weaning is a good option for reducing calf stress at weaning. Early-weaned calves should be placed on a high plane of nutrition, while their dams can be placed on lower-quality forages and feeds.

Feeder-calf markets are often seasonally high in March and April, so consider optimum marketing times and methods for fall-born calves. Calf verification programs may be an attractive option for marketing feeder calves. Breeders should share information on breed association-sponsored feeder-calf marketing programs, such as AngusSource[®] with bull customers to help in marketing their calves. Run a breakeven analysis on retained ownership options, including stocker and finishing programs. Consider risk-management strategies before finalizing marketing plans.

Southern Great Plains

by **David Lalman**, Oklahoma State University,
dlalman@okstate.edu

Fall-calving herds

Cool-season annual and perennial forages should be growing rapidly. These high-quality forage resources can be used as a supplement to low-quality standing forage or hay. One very effective limit-grazing strategy is to use four-hour grazing bouts at two- to four-day intervals, depending on stage of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 222

production, condition and age of the cows, and quality of the dry forage base. Another common method is to graze cows on the cool-season pasture for two days, followed by three to five days of grazing low-quality forage or hay.

In many native range situations, cool-season annual grasses will begin to grow, resulting in increased protein content of the diet. One effective strategy is to switch from a high-protein supplement, such as 30%-40% protein, to a moderate-protein supplement in the 20%-25% range. Hay feeding may be advised, although only if standing forage is becoming limiting. Since the breeding season has ended, a modest loss of weight and condition is acceptable for 4- to 8-year-old cows.

Vaccinate heifer calves between 4 and 10 months of age for brucellosis.

Spring-calving herds

Limit-grazing cool-season pasture is equally as effective for spring-calving cows, although more difficult to manage with baby calves.

March and early April are frequently the times of year when spring-calving cows lose

the most weight. Some producers avoid rapid weight loss by feeding high-quality hay during this short period, while others reduce the protein concentration in the supplement and increase the feeding rate.

If AI is to be used, plan the synchronization system and purchase the necessary supplies and products. Some systems require implementation of the synchronization plan as early as 35 days prior to the initial breeding date. Many universities publish fact sheets that describe various synchronization systems.

Breeding soundness exams should be performed on herd bulls, preferably before spring bull sales. Since bulls will be restrained during this procedure, this is an opportune time to perform other maintenance steps, such as vaccinating, trimming feet, tagging or re-tagging, cutting hair away from ear tags, etc.

After calving and before breeding (30 days before, preferably), vaccinate cows according to your local veterinarian's recommendations.

Early March is a good time to check weights on replacement heifers to determine if an adjustment in their nutritional program

is necessary. The traditional recommendation is to target 65% of expected mature body weight by the beginning of the breeding season [812 pounds (lb.) if mature weight is 1,250 lb.].

General recommendations

Sample soil from established Bermuda grass, Old World bluestem and love grass pastures to determine fertilizer needs. Cool-season perennial forages can still be fertilized in early March, if not already done.

Remove old growth from weeping love grass and Old World bluestem by grazing, clipping or burning.

Hay feeding areas in improved pastures should be burned, raked, lightly tilled if necessary, and reseeded with grasses and legumes. With a little early spring maintenance, these damaged areas can recover rapidly.

If not already completed, plant or broadcast spring-seeded legumes, such as lespedeza, sweet clover, red clover and white clover. Remember to inoculate legume seeds before planting. Inoculation is an inconvenient and often-overlooked step that pays huge dividends.

Use prescribed fire to improve forage quality, reduce ticks and control brush.

Magnesium-fortified mineral supplements should be supplied to cows grazing cool-season annual or cool-season perennial forages.

Western Region

by **Randy Perry**, *California State University, Fresno*, randyp@csufresno.edu

This month I am going to change the format of my column and will follow this format on an every-other-month basis. Instead of focusing on the details concerning herd management in the different areas such as nutrition, reproduction and health for fall- and spring-calving herds, I am going to cover an individual topic that would pertain to both fall- and spring-calving herds and cover it in more detail.

The topic for this month is the development and marketing of bulls. In most purebred cattle operations, income from the sale of bulls represents the largest percentage of annual income. Therefore, determining how to maximize net profit from the development and marketing of this group of

animals is extremely important in terms of influencing the financial success of the operation.

My focus is going to be more on the development as compared to the marketing of bulls, because I am not qualified to address that topic. However, marketing ability is extremely important and is one area that most beef producers struggle with for many years as they get started in the business. Most bulls are marketed to commercial cow-calf producers, and it takes an extended period of time to establish relationships with these producers and develop the customer base to become a successful marketer of beef bulls.

The weakening of the U.S. dollar and the demand for corn for ethanol production have dramatically increased the price of corn and basically all other commodities that are fed to livestock. Unless you have access to cull fruits or vegetables, or other byproducts that are not commonly fed to livestock, there is no such thing as cheap feed this year.

As an example, almond hulls are a commodity that many cattle producers feed in our state. Thirty years ago you could get almond hulls for free as long as you hauled them from the hulling facility. Then for many

years the price of almond hulls stayed close to approximately \$40 per ton. Over time they increased to around \$80 per ton and stayed around that price for an extended period. Almond hulls are currently selling for approximately \$180 per ton in our area. That fact is almost unbelievable to me.

Increasing feed costs are having a dramatic influence on the cost of developing both bulls and heifers. Some producers can develop their calves on pasture by providing supplemental nutrition to achieve the desired level of performance. This is a tremendous advantage for these producers, especially in a period of high feed prices such as we are experiencing. This practice is more commonly used for heifers as compared to bulls, but it can be used for both sexes. However, most purebred beef producers have to confine their calves to a drylot for developmental purposes.

For many years, depending on the type of feeding operation and location, costs of developing bulls ranged from \$2-\$3 per head per day. My guess is that this year most producers will be facing development costs of \$3-\$4 per head per day. Some producers in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 224

our area are already facing rates even higher than \$4 per head per day. The point is that development costs this year are going to be considerably higher than what most beef producers have ever experienced.

It is going to be extremely important that we avoid two things when developing bulls this year. First, we have to avoid feeding below-average bulls. I think these bulls are going to be extremely difficult to market and, thus, it will be difficult to recoup our

investment in them. However, the problem is that the demand for Angus bulls has been so strong during the last 10 years that many Angus producers have never castrated a bull calf. This is going to be a year when producers better look at their bull calves with a critical eye and a sharp knife.

The second critical factor is that producers will have to avoid feeding bulls for too long. This year, a \$1,000 weaned bull calf will probably be about the same as a \$2,500 long yearling in terms of net profit.

I would strongly encourage producers to get a handle on all costs that are going into the development and marketing of their

bulls. With those costs in front of you, sit down and determine the optimum age to market bulls to maximize net profit.

Midwest Region

by **Twig Marston**, Kansas State University,
tmarston@oznet.ksu.edu

Manage calving pens and pastures to minimize human, cow and calf stress. Stay organized.

► An observation schedule should be implemented for calving first-calf heifers and cows. First-calf heifers should be checked every two to three hours.

- ▶ Sanitation is key to reduce and/or eliminate calf scours. An excellent calving pasture management plan by David Smith from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln can be found at <http://beef.unl.edu/beefreports/symp-2003-19-XVIII.pdf>.
- ▶ Make sure every calf consumes adequate colostrum during the first four to 12 hours after birth.
- ▶ Keep accurate calving records, including cow ID, calf ID, birth date, calving difficulty score and birth weight. Other traits to consider recording are teat and udder scores, calf vigor score and other pertinent information. This information, along with Angus sire information, is vital for enrolling cattle in the AngusSource program.
- ▶ Calving books are essential sources of information; make sure you have a backup copy.
- ▶ Condition score cows. Thin and young cows will need extra energy to maintain yearly calving intervals.
- ▶ If cow diets are going to be shifted from low-quality forage (poor-quality forage or dormant grass) to high-quality forage (lush green grass), begin a grass tetany prevention program at least three weeks prior to the forage switch.
- ▶ When making genetic selections, use the most recent National Cattle Evaluation (NCE) and herd records judiciously.
- ▶ If new bulls are purchased, now is the time to start preparing them for their first breeding season. Bulls need to be properly vaccinated and conditioned to be athletic. A bull having moderate body condition with abundant exercise is ideal.
- ▶ After calving and before breeding, vaccinate cows as recommended by your veterinarian.
- ▶ Plan to attend beef production meetings.

