

Reproductive Tools Available for Beef Producers

AI and estrous-synchronization programs can prove helpful during breeding season.

by *Mary Lou Peter, K-State Research & Extension News*

Record-high cattle prices early this year mean there's that much more at stake for the 2014 breeding season, according to Kansas State University (K-State) beef reproduction specialist Sandy Johnson. She is reminding producers of tools available to help choose optimal breeding systems and implement them successfully.

"The AI Cowculator is available for handheld devices to compare the cost of artificial insemination (AI) to natural service," said Johnson, who is based at the Northwest Area K-State Research-Extension Center in Colby. The tool was developed based on data generated at the University of Minnesota by then graduate student John Rodgers, working under Cliff Lamb. Rodgers now works in industry and Lamb is with the University of Florida. More information about the AI Cowculator is available at the AI Cowculator Facebook page.

The AI Cowculator is built on data from a study of eight herds that compared fixed-time AI (FTAI) to natural service. The study showed the net advantage for use of timed AI was \$49 per cow exposed to bulls, Johnson said. Producers input their own values pertaining to such factors as bull maintenance cost, bull purchase price, useful life, AI cost and percent calf crop to assess the economics in their own herd.

For those who artificially inseminate their cows, but have limited time and labor, synchronizing estrus is helpful, she said. An updated program called the Estrus Synchronization Planner, an online, downloadable Excel-based tool at K-State's Research and Extension beef website

(www.asi.k-state.edu/species/beef/research-and-extension/), can help producers select and implement a synchronization protocol. A version for use on handheld devices (EstruSynch) has also been released recently.

"Because of time and labor constraints, many producers have found today's protocols for synchronization of estrus work well to reduce or eliminate the need for heat detection," she said. "If you don't AI yourself, you can schedule an AI technician to be there at the appointed time to do the breeding. Correctly implementing the synchronization treatment is a critical detail in a successful AI program."

The updated version of the synchronization planner contains a new FTAI protocol for heifers and other improvements that users have suggested, Johnson said. Those using the planner can now indicate what product brand name they will use and

the brand name will show up on the printed calendar.



PHOTO BY TROY SMITH

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"This is intended to help the all-too-common problem of getting two basic types of products confused and giving the wrong product on the wrong day," she said.

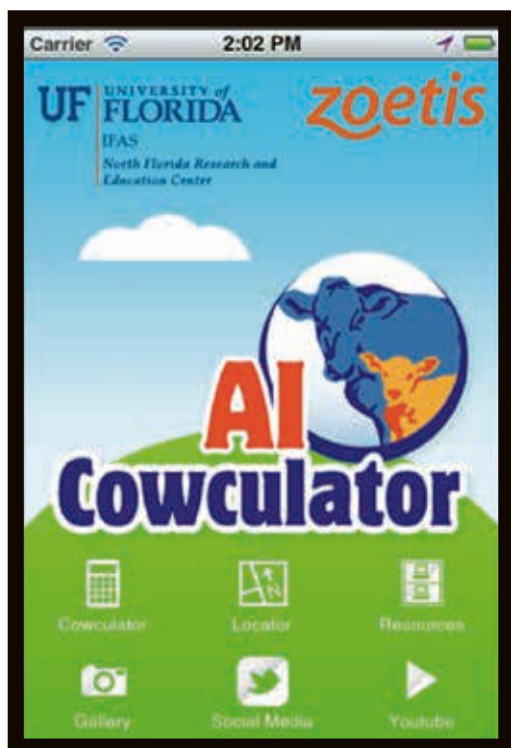
A recent survey conducted by Johnson showed that 79% of the synchronization planner's users agreed that the planner was easy to use, and similarly thought it made scheduling easier and reduced errors. Most users said it improved communication, helped achieve timely planning and preparation, and more than half said it directed them to a more appropriate protocol.

The new version for use on mobile devices will email the schedule to the appropriate people once the protocol is selected and breeding dates are entered, Johnson said.

"Technology can't overcome poor cow condition, however, so good management and attention to detail is still needed," she said.



Editor's Note: This article was provided by K-State Research & Extension.



► The AI Cowculator is designed to help producers compare the cost of using artificial insemination vs. natural service.