Angus Advisor

► **MARCH** herd management tips

Guide to abbreviations and acronyms

To make the "Angus Advisor" more concise and consistent, we have used the following abbreviations or expressions:

$Values	dollar value indexes
ADG	average daily gain
AI	artificial insemination
AIMS	Angus Information Management Software
BCS	body condition score
BLV	bovine leukemia virus
BMP	best management practices
BQA	beef quality assurance
BRD	bovine respiratory disease
BRSV	bovine respiratory synctial virus
brucellosis	Bang's disease
BSE	bovine spongiform encephalopathy
BVD	bovine viral diarrhea
Ca	calcium
CHAPS	Cow Herd Analysis and Performance System
DM	dry matter
EPD	expected progeny difference
FMD	foot-and-mouth disease
GnRH	gonadotropin-releasing hormone
IBR	infectious bovine rhinotracheitis
ID	identification
IM	intramuscular
in.	inch
lb.	pound
LCT	lower critical temperature
lepto	leptospirosis
Mg	magnesium
MiG	management-intensive grazing
MLV	modified-live virus
N	nitrogen
P	phosphorus
PI	persistent infection
PI_3	parainfluenza-3 virus
preg-check	pregnancy-check
Se	selenium
sq. ft.	square feet
SPA	Standardized Performance Analysis
TB	bovine tuberculosis
TDN	total digestible nutrients
THI	temperature-humidity index
trich	trichomoniasis
Zn	zinc

Midwest Region

*by **Twig Marston**, University of Nebraska, tmarston2@unl.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.

Southeastern Region

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

General recommendations

Nutritional management. Maintain at least a 4-in. average stubble height on winter annual pastures to avoid overgrazing. Temporary, portable electric fencing is an excellent tool for implementing rotational-, limit-, strip- or creep-grazing systems.

Fertilize cool-season grasses according to soil tests if not done earlier. Plan to incorporate legumes such as white clover into forage systems to reduce nitrogen fertilizer needs and improve 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 mineral supplement to cows and heifers on these 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. BQA-consistent practices should be included in the health program.

Secure a premises ID number for your ranch from your state veterinarian's office if you have not already done so. Work to develop a ranch-level disease and disaster plan. Your local Extension agent 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. Enterprise budgeting and

cash flow analyses are worthwhile exercises. Finish tax returns this month to avoid last-minute preparation stress.

Spring-calving herds

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

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. Take time to study this information for making informed selection decisions.

Conduct breeding soundness exams (sometimes referred to as BSEs), and make sure bulls are in good condition in advance of spring breeding. Provide additional nutrients to bulls if needed.

For 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 IBR at least 30 days before breeding. Consult with a veterinarian for BVD recommendations for the local area. Start breeding heifers about a month before the cow herd.

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 to rebreed early.

Fall-calving herds

Breeding management. 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 to 60 days after the end of the breeding season or earlier if using ultrasound technology.

Calf management. 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

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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 feeder calf marketing. Breeders should share information on breed association-sponsored feeder-calf marketing programs with bull customers to help in marketing their calves. Run a breakeven analysis on retained ownership options, including stocker and finishing programs, and consider risk management strategies before finalizing marketing plans.

Western Region

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

This month I am going to change the format of my contribution to this column. 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 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.

The 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 it is one area that most purebred producers struggle with for many years as they get started in the business. Most bulls are marketed to commercial cow-calf producers. It takes an extended period of time to establish the relationships with these producers and the customer base to become a successful marketer of commercial bulls.

Higher feed costs have had a dramatic influence on the cost of developing both bulls and heifers. Some producers can develop their calves out on pasture by providing supplemental nutrition to achieve the desired level of performance. This is a tremendous advantage, especially in periods of high feed prices such as we have experienced during the last couple of years. 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, the costs of developing bulls ranged from $2 to $2.50 per head per day, depending on the location and type of feeding operation. However, since the ethanol fiasco drove corn prices through the roof, many producers have faced developmental costs of $3 to $4 per head per day or higher. Feed prices have weakened some, but my guess is that it will be a long time before we again feed bulls for $2 per head per day.

It is going to be extremely important that we avoid two things when developing bulls now and in the future. First, we have to avoid feeding below-average bulls. These bulls are difficult to market, and thus it is difficult to recoup our investment in them. However, the demand for Angus bulls had been so strong during the last 10 years that many Angus producers in our state have never castrated a bull calf. I think this is going to be a year when producers should look at their bull calves with a critical eye and a sharp knife.

In our area, many of our producers have already started castrating a significant portion of their bull calves. This will also help tremendously in terms of decreasing the supply of bulls that will be available during the next sale season. The problem with this scenario is that it is extremely difficult to make most purebred operations work financially when weaned steer calves may only bring $500-$600 per head.

The second critical factor is that producers will have to minimize the developmental or feeding period. Bulls eat through a lot of profit at $4 per head per day. If we could get more commercial cow-calf producers to buy bull calves at weaning, it would be a win-win situation for both purebred and commercial producers. The only drawback is that purebred producers would sacrifice yearling measurements.

However, a $1,000 weaned bull calf will probably net more dollars than a $2,500 long yearling. In addition, bulls would be gone long before they cause a lot of the problems and headaches for which they are known. Commercial producers would be able to acclimate the bulls to their own country and would be able to develop them to fit their own needs.

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 them, sit down and develop a written plan and strategy to maximize net profit.

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 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.