Angus Advisor

▶ **OCTOBER** 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
CP	crude protein
cwt.	hundredweight
DM	dry matter
EPD	expected progeny difference
ET	embryo transfer
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

Western Region

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

This month I am going to change the format of my column. Rather than focusing on the details concerning herd management in different areas, I am going to cover a couple topics that are extremely important for any purebred herd.

Business plan. The first topic is the importance of developing a business plan. Many of our purebred breeders have outside income that covers the losses associated with their purebred cattle operations. In my opinion, it is troublesome that a higher percentage of these operations are not economically sustainable on their own.

Most of the purebred breeders in our part of the country have historically generated most of their income through the sale of commercial bulls and a limited number of purebred females. The number of commercial cows in our state has declined through the years, and feed costs have driven up development costs on bulls considerably. However, the demand for and average prices of range bulls has been outstanding the last few years in our state. Thus, bull sales have proven to be quite profitable for many purebred producers during this time period.

The marketing of purebred females has been more challenging. This part of the purebred business has almost dried up totally in our part of the country. I don't know all of the causes; however, fewer numbers of new purebred breeders and widespread use of ET are most likely two factors that are involved. Females can always be marketed as commercial females; however, it is hard to justify the added labor and expense associated with purebred cattle if the progeny are going to be sold as commercial cattle.

I think it is extremely important that breeders sit down and really put some time and effort into developing a business plan for their operations that addresses how their operation can be most efficient. It is paramount that breeders really understand where expenses are generated and how income can be maximized.

Marketing plan. The ability to market livestock is critically important in determining the level of success with any species of purebred livestock. Many areas of management such as reproduction, health or nutrition are equally important, whether you are managing purebred or commercial livestock. However, that is not the case in the area of marketing. In my opinion, many times marketing is the factor that differentiates the really successful vs. average purebred operations. Many times, average producers will have cattle that are just as good from a genetic and phenotypic standpoint; however, they never get to that elite level because they simply don't have the marketing ability to get there.

I am of no help to anybody in this area because my marketing skills are average at best. However, firms are available that are outstanding in helping breeders with the development of advertising and websites. In addition, I would encourage purebred breeders to develop a marketing plan that ensures their advertising dollars are being placed in media that are tailored most closely to their potential clientele, and the timing of those advertisements will reach potential customers at the most opportune time to achieve marketing success.

In addition, and probably most important, study and learn from the purebred operations that do a tremendous job with marketing because we have many such operations involved with this breed of cattle.

Midwest Region

*by **Justin Sexten**, University of Missouri, sextenj@missouri.edu*

Weaning and marketing

Weaning is an important marketing decision since current and future profitability is influenced by weaning timing, cow culling, replacement retention and calf-marketing programs.

Consider cow condition, forage availability and market signals rather than calendar date when deciding when to wean calves. Reduced forage availability due to drought and resulting loss of cow condition forced many producers to consider weaning calves early last year. Producers may consider delayed weaning due to abundant rainfall and mild temperatures this year.

Scoring cows for body condition during late summer allows producers to document condition loss or gain and make informed

weaning decisions. Body condition scores can be determined without gathering cattle and are the best indicator of nutritional status without the additional stress associated with gathering. Record the condition score when evaluating a group to ensure historic records to allow for weekly or monthly comparisons.

Delayed weaning due to adequate cow condition and sufficient forage resources increases weaning age and weight while potentially moving calves into a more favorable marketing period. If considering delayed marketing, make sure to evaluate young and old cows to ensure these critical management groups are not overlooked.

Balancing current nutritional status with required precalving weight changes can be challenging. Ensure cows are BCS 5 or greater at calving. After weaning, spring-calving cows generally accumulate condition due to reduced nutrient requirements for milk, cool autumn temperatures and renewed cool-season forage growth. If cows are thin, consider weaning calves so cows regain condition while grazing fall regrowth pastures. From a weaned calf marketing standpoint, weaning now may also make sense, as historically calf prices begin to decline following Labor Day.

Following weaning, most cull cows are immediately sold, resulting in depressed autumn cull cow markets. Consider using excess pasture or crop residues to add weight to thin, sound cull cows while moving to a more favorable marketing window. Bulls may be kept with open cows, potentially increasing cull-cow value. With historic low cattle inventory, these short-bred cull cows, while not suited to one's production system, may be valuable for another operation.

Determining how many cows to cull and replacement heifers to retain are other weaning-time decisions. The decision to retain replacements is a balance between current cash-flow needs and long-term forage availability. With increased forage supplies and low cow inventory, producers may opt to retain more replacements. Increased replacement-heifer retention for operation growth can be a short-term challenge to cash flow or family living income due to reduced sales.

Alternative to retaining replacement heifers is purchasing bred replacement heifers or cows, which reduces development feed needs and shortens the investment period. With this system true replacement costs are known, and specific genetic and/or health traits can be incorporated into the cow herd. Aside from the herd sire, replacement cows or heifers are the second-largest genetic source in most operations.

Determining when to wean should be

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cow-dependent, whereas postweaning calf management is facility-, labor- and forage-dependent. There are numerous preconditioning and wean-and-vaccinate programs available to producers at all management levels. The best postweaning management program is one suited to your management level, facility capabilities and feed resources.

If feed and forage resources are limited, but facilities are available, consider using a weaning program focused on vaccinating calves prior to and at weaning. Vaccination programs offer producers the opportunity to add value to calves without increased feed and forage needs associated with longer-term preconditioning programs.

Producers with adequate feed and forage resources may consider preconditioning calves in order to market heavier calves. Preconditioning programs range from simply bunk-breaking calves to a full two-month feeding period. Consider the program requirements when selecting postweaning management programs to fit your management and resources. Research shows as value-added program requirements increase, premiums paid also increase.

Recent value-of-gain calculations indicate an additional pound of gain on weaned calves ranges from $1 to $1.20 per pound (lb.). Daily costs for a 45-day preconditioning program range from $1.65 to $1.75 per day. For preconditioning to pay in this example, ADG must exceed 1.5 lb. per day. Using cost and value of gain without premiums allows producers to evaluate if preconditioning is cost-effective or feasible at the beginning of the enterprise.

Mid-South Atlantic Region

*by **Scott Greiner,** sgreiner@vt.edu; and **Mark McCann,** mark.mccann@vt.edu, both of Virginia Tech*

October is usually regarded as the harvest month, but it also marks the peak of the marketing season for spring calves. As such, it is the time when your investment in calf-crop genetics, herd health and marketing can be rewarded with added value. Stay informed on the market. Compare the price you received for your calves vs. calves sold through alternative methods. If you are not participating in a value-added program, evaluate your sale receipts vs. program calves.

Now is the time to begin planning for marketing of next year's calves. Many state and local groups have branded calf programs with a variety of prescribed management protocols that range from basic wean-and-vaccinate programs to those with genetic/sire requirements and postweaning management specifications.

Spring-calving herds (January-March)

General

- Finalize plans for marketing of calf crop. Coordinate and time weaning, vaccination program, and weaning-time management in concert with marketing plans. Calculate breakevens on various marketing options and consider risk-management strategies.
- Schedule and conduct pregnancy diagnosis with veterinarian. Plan a marketing strategy for open cows.
- Evaluate winter feed and forage supplies and options, including forage tests to determine nutritional content of hay on hand.

Nutrition and forages

- Score cows for body condition at weaning and separate thin cows.
- Use palatable feeds and high-quality hay to background calves.
- Continue stockpiling tall fescue.
- Continue to manage first-calf heifers separately; give them the best forage. Thin, mature cows could be added to this group.
- Continue to feed high-selenium trace-mineral salt. A forage analysis can reveal what other minerals should be supplemented.
- As warm-season pastures approach dormancy, continue to use grazing management to manage residue.
- Store your high-quality hay in the dry.

Herd health

- In consultation with your veterinarian, finalize vaccination and preconditioning protocol for calf crop.

Reproduction

- Schedule pregnancy-check of cow herd with veterinarian.
- Cull open, old and thin cows and cows with problem udders, eyes and soundness issues.

Genetics

Collect 205-day weights on calf crop at appropriate time (AHIR® age range: 120-280 days), along with cow weights, hip heights and body condition scores (cow mature size data taken within 45 days of calf weaning measure).

Identify replacement heifers. Utilize available tools, including genetics, dam performance, individual performance and phenotype. Restrict replacement heifer pool to those born in defined calving season.

Fall-calving herds (September-November)

General

- Calving season is in full swing. Check cows frequently during calving season — optimal interval is to observe calving females every four hours (heifers more frequently, if possible). Address calving difficulties early.
- Tag; tattoo; and record birth weight, calving ease score, teat/udder score and

mothering ability of dam. Keep accurate records at birth.
- Monitor young calves for scours. Prevent scours by keeping calving area clean and well-drained. Moving 2- to 3-day-old pairs out of calving area to separate pasture (reduce commingling of newborn calves with older calves) helps reduce exposure to scours.
- Evaluate winter feed and forage supplies and options, including forage tests to determine nutritional content of hay on hand.
- Initiate plans and schedule for breeding season.

Nutrition and forages
- Evaluate growth of yearling heifers with goal of reaching 60%-65% of mature weight by breeding. Depending on forage quality, supplementation may be needed to meet weight gain target.
- Offer high-magnesium mineral. Generally, fall-calving cows are not as predisposed to grass tetany, but this year's cool, wet conditions increase the risk.
- Reserve high-quality hay and stockpiled pasture areas for cows postcalving. Use strip-grazing as a tool to increase the efficiency of utilization of cool-season pastures by cows postcalving.
- Use grazing management to control the residue of warm-season pastures as they approach dormancy.
- Store your high-quality hay in the dry.

Herd health
- Ensure colostrum intake within the first few hours of life in newborn calves. Supplement if necessary. Newborn calves need 10% of body weight in colostrum in the first 24 hours of life.
- Provide selenium and vitamin A and D injections to newborn calves.
- Castrate commercial calves at birth.
- Monitor calves closely for scours and pneumonia; have treatment supplies on hand.
- Consult with your veterinarian concerning prebreeding vaccination schedule for cow herd and yearling heifers. Plan early to allow 30-day vaccination window prior to breeding season.

Reproduction
- Reproductive tract score and measure pelvic area on yearling replacement heifers.
- Plan AI and synchronization program to be used during breeding season. Schedule AI technician, order supplies and semen.
- Schedule and conduct breeding soundness exams on herd sires, including annual vaccinations. Do so prior to fall/early winter bull sales to allow time to secure replacements as necessary.

Genetics
- Collect yearling performance data (weight, height, scrotal, ultrasound) in seedstock herds.
- Evaluate bull battery and begin planning for the breeding season by evaluating herd genetic goals and selection criteria for both AI and natural-service sires. Establish herd strengths and weaknesses from genetic standpoint, and benchmark EPD criteria accordingly. Make plans for bull-buying season.

Southern Great Plains

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

General

Forage and hay availability remains extremely variable throughout the Southern Great Plains. The eastern two-thirds of Oklahoma has experienced one of the wettest and coolest summers on record. Frequent summer rainfall combined with the late, cool spring weather conditions in this region have resulted in delayed harvest of warm-season hay by as much as a month. It seems like I can always make a case for a low-quality hay crop, and this summer is no exception! Much of the hay harvested during July and August has also had some rain damage.

While most counties in Oklahoma have experienced incredible drought recovery, the same cannot be said for the western and southern regions of the Southern Great Plains. There are not many cows left in the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles, eastern New Mexico, eastern Colorado or western Kansas. I should say there are not many left on pasture, because in these areas more and more cows have made their way to feedyards where they are being maintained on concentrate diets rather than forage diets. In an intensive management environment (like a feedyard), cows can be maintained with a finishing-type diet containing very little forage or roughage.

Because the finishing diet has a much higher concentration of energy than forage, only about 60% of the total amount of feed is required. This strategy to maintain cows makes a lot of sense with the recent decline in grain prices, extreme low cow inventory and excess feedlot capacity (empty feedlot pens) throughout the United States.

Spring-calving herds
1. Wean and individually weigh calves and administer booster vaccinations according to the herd health plan.
2. Individually weigh, condition score and preg-check cows and bred heifers. Some herd health programs call for vaccinations at weaning.
3. Cull females that are open this fall. Our experience in the OSU research herd and other data shows that rolling open cows into the fall-calving herd or keeping them for an entire year results in a very poor success rate: around 50%-60% pregnancy rate in subsequent breeding seasons.
4. Report whole-herd records to your breed association. Few producers report whole-herd individual cow weights and BCS. This information is critically needed as we go forward into a time of extremely high input costs, and the need to improve overall efficiency of beef production.
5. Treat cows and calves for internal and external parasites as recommended by your veterinarian. This is best timed after the first killing frost, although many understandably do this at weaning to save time and labor.

Fall-calving herds
1. Evaluate herd bulls for semen quality and purchase new herd bulls using a balanced, multiple-trait selection approach. If possible, ask to see the dams of bulls you are interested in purchasing. Selection for good udder quality and other desirable female characteristics (like moderate mature size and fleshing ability) begins with bull and semen purchases.
2. Closely monitor late-calving heifers for possible calving problems.
3. Purchase herd health products that will be needed for the fall "branding" time herd health program.

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