



Angus Stakes

► by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

Investigate reproductive failure

Reproductive success in a cow herd hinges on so many things — the cow, the bull, nutrition, health, vaccinations, stress, the technician, technician stress, interruptions, etc. To get to the bottom of a reproductive failure can be a little exasperating. This spring could hold some surprises for a lot of cattlemen.

Anticipating calving season

I've heard more than one or two "experts" say they are apprehensive about what we're going to find in terms of calving percentages this spring — and that's after a fall preaching the value of pregnancy testing to avoid carrying any open cows through a high-cost winter feeding period. Last summer's heat, the drought and nutritional implications caused by it, the health implications of cattle moving state to state due to drought, the nutritional differences in alternative feed sources and more will factor into the number of calves born and the number of calves that survive their first week.

It's important that you do get to the bottom of reproductive failures in your herd and possibly in your customers' herds. You are probably going to have to enlist some help in doing so — your veterinarian, at a bare minimum. Your state forage-testing laboratory, an extension beef specialist and a nutritionist could offer valuable insight.

Your state climatologist might even be of help. If a bull goes infertile (he sires calves early in the season, but then stops), it might be a benefit to know if there was a weather event (heat or extreme cold) that could have

affected his sperm-producing ability. On the other hand, could there have been an extreme heat or herd-wide health event that caused embryo loss, affecting embryo loss for more than one sire?

Your own records of what happened on what day can help pinpoint potential problems, as well. Did you move the heifers during that critical time slot [see George Perry's presentation on page 152 in our coverage of the Applied Reproductive Strategies in Beef Cattle (ARSBC) symposium]? Were you delayed getting a cow artificially inseminated (AIed)? Maybe a different technician was filling in for your regular technician.

If reproductive success is the No. 1 factor in beef herd profitability, understanding what went wrong is vital to your bottom line.

Issue focus

A great resource in understanding the factors of reproductive success is found in the information shared by the presenters at the ARSBC symposium that was hosted in Sioux Falls, S.D., in December. Speakers covered the gamut — from causes of bull infertility to nutritional influences to handling mistakes

with semen and embryos. Estrous-synchronization strategies and AI technique were priorities of the conference, but the program gave appropriate attention to those management factors that underpin the success of any breeding program.

In this issue we provide a summary of each of the ARSBC presentations. More details — including the speakers' proceedings papers, PowerPoints and audios of the presentations themselves — are available online at www.appliedreprostrategies.com/2012/SiouxFalls/newsroom.html.

Genetic prediction

Maybe as important as figuring out the causes for failure is discovering if there were bloodlines that withstood all those challenges and achieved reproductive success. While that may seem challenging on an individual herd basis, when all the information is pooled together in the database that you have been a part of creating, as a breed we can start to see significant differences. Then, even genetic differences for those lowly heritable traits can become obvious.

It takes data input, and that's up to you. If you haven't enrolled in the Association's MaternalPlus® program, consider doing so now. You had to do a herd inventory for your property tax assessment at the first of the year, and for many ranchers that meant reviewing every tag number in every pasture. Use that momentum to update your herd inventory at the Association and then enroll your herd in MaternalPlus.

I'll go so far as to say the information you help generate will contribute more to your profitability five years from now — and the dominance of the Angus breed — than collecting weaning or yearling weights.

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