

# Flexible Synchronization Fits

A Georgia producer fits the synchronization program to the circumstances.

Story & photos by **Becky Mills**

**E**ddie Bradley has one hard-and-fast rule for his artificial insemination (AI) program — AI is not *just* an option. He states, “If I had to quit AI breeding, I’d quit altogether.”

The Hiawassee, Ga., producer makes full use of the semen tank for his 20 registered cows and his 70-cow commercial herd. “I can use bulls I can’t afford to buy, I can breed a lot of cattle in a hurry, and the AI-sired calves are worth a whole lot more,” he explains.

Bradley sends steers to Iowa’s Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity (TCSCF) through the Georgia Beef Challenge, the state feedout program. “The AI-sired steers are more predictable, he says. “If you’ve done your homework, you know how they are going to grow and what kind of carcass they are going to have.”

Along with keeping 12-14 replacement heifers for his own herd, Bradley also markets replacement heifers through the Georgia Beef Expo sale and by private treaty.

“With heifers, AI is the best selling tool,” Bradley says. “When buyers see a recognized bull as a sire, they’ll give more for them.”

## Synchronized success

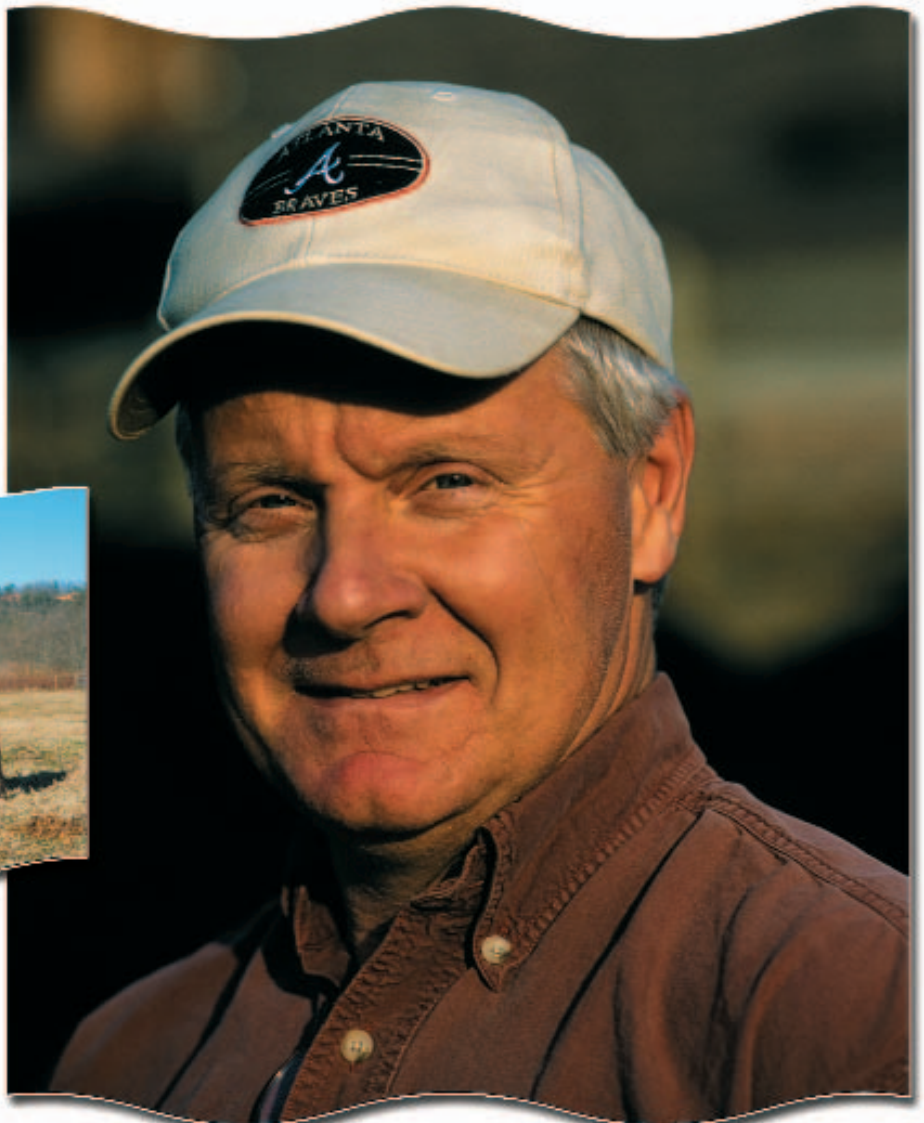
Although Bradley is adamant about using

AI, he is anything but rigid when it comes to synchronization systems. In 12 years of breeding his own cattle, as well as breeding a couple hundred head a year for friends and neighbors, he’s tried just about every synchronization program available. Now, he has narrowed them down to a few favorites,



► **Above:** AI adds value to Eddie Bradley’s purebred Angus herd, as well as to his commercial herd.

► **Right:** Bradley uses heat synchronization to make AI more practical on his own operation, as well as for those of neighbors and friends.



but tailors them to meet the needs of the individual herd.

When he is breeding cattle away from home, a tight synchronization program and timed breeding is a must. "The biggest thing I use for other people is GnRH (gonadotropin-releasing hormone) and a CIDR®," he says. "It tightens up their cycles, and you'll get more of them settled when you're breeding at one time."

GnRH is a hormone that synchronizes follicular development. A CIDR is an intravaginal device that secretes progesterone, which keeps the cattle from coming into heat. Bradley gives the GnRH injection on Day 1 and inserts the CIDR the same day. On Day 7, he removes the CIDR and gives an injection of prostaglandin (PG, such as Lutalyse®) to bring the cattle in heat.

"If the producer is close by, he'll heat-detect, and I'll breed the cattle that come in heat for the first 60 to 72 hours," Bradley explains. For those that don't show heat before the first 72 hours, he gives them another injection of GnRH and breeds them.

"I don't think you should time-breed anything without GnRH," he says. "It is the best tool we have for AI — I use it a lot. If she is anywhere close to coming in heat, she'll ovulate. If the semen is in there, she'll settle. It also helps with cystic cattle."

Using that method, Bradley says he'll normally breed 90% of the cattle he synchronizes and settle 50%-60% of them.

As for costs, CIDRs are about \$8-\$9 each. With the injections of GnRH and Lutalyse, Bradley says the synchronization program normally costs around \$15 per head.

### Long-term project

For his own cattle, Bradley can be more flexible, since he normally is around to heat-check. "I like MGA (melengestrol acetate) — that's my number one thing. I have good luck with it, and it is cheap."

The downside is that synchronizing with MGA is a long-term project. "You have to start planning 30 to 40 days ahead of time," Bradley says.

MGA is a feed compound originally developed to keep feedlot heifers from coming in heat. Bradley starts top-dressing it on his heifers' or cows' supplement on Day 1 and feeds it through Day 14. He stops feeding it for 17-19 days, then gives an injection of Lutalyse. Normally, the bulk of the cattle will show heat by the third day after the Lutalyse injection.

"You can time-breed them with this method, but I'll breed on sight (by heat detection) for 84 hours," Bradley says. If he



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does time-breed the cattle, he gives a GnRH injection at breeding.

"I'm confident I'll get 75% of them bred if I'm here to watch heat," he says. "I'll do 25 at a time. I'll get 18 to 19 on the first breeding if they are my own cattle, and I'm here to watch them. On cows, if you breed for two cycles, you'll get them all. You won't with heifers — some of those are hard to breed."

On his own operation, he'll also use MGA as a substitute for the more expensive CIDRs in the GnRH-CIDR program and feed it for the six days between the GnRH and Lutalyse injections.

"Before, 10% of them would be in heat the day before I started breeding. Now, the MGA or CIDR keeps those cows from coming in heat. The extra shot of progesterone might start the anestrus cows cycling, too," he says.

"The beauty of MGA is it can now be top-dressed," he adds. Before, he says, "You would have to buy a whole bag to mix in, and it would feed a whole feedlot. Now I can get MGA 2000. It does seven heifers for 14 days."

Depending on the manufacturer's directions, Bradley says he feeds it at the rate of half a pound to a pound per head per day. He says he can feed it for the entire 14-day period for around \$2.50 to \$3.00 per head.

He adds, though, "It is probably better to sight-breed with MGA — it doesn't synchronize as tightly as a CIDR. But, we'll get 65% to 70% of the cows or heifers settled when we breed on heat."

This year, Bradley is depending on his eyes and Lutalyse for his cows, bred the first week of February.

"I start heat-checking a month ahead of when I plan to breed them. When it gets to my week to breed, I'll know to either shoot them with Lutalyse or, if they are due in, do nothing," he says. "If they haven't shown heat, I'll give them an injection of GnRH and stick a CIDR in."

### Figuring it out

"This guy has it figured out," comments Bill Beal, Virginia Tech animal scientist. "When he needs to time-breed, he spends the money on CIDRs. It is also the perfect system in that he has to rely on the fewest trips through the chute to maximize time-breeding."

"In his own program, he is right to breed on detected heat," Beal continues. "He'll get a 5% to 15% advantage over time-breeding. He is really smart to switch to MGA, a less expensive progesterone source, in place of a more expensive program. He did an excellent job of choosing a lower-cost option."

Bradley is confident enough in his home program that he says, "I may do them all AI this time and forget the bull."

He emphasizes, though, "None of this is worth a flip if the cows and heifers aren't in decent body condition and aren't vaccinated right."

