

Producer Perspective on Reproductive Technologies

South Dakota cattleman shares viewpoints on reproductive technology use.

by *Kasey Brown*, associate editor

Technology allows us to be a least-cost, value-added producer. We were able to expand the ranch and bring in the next generation without sacrificing,” explained Chad Blair of Blair Bros. Angus Ranch near Sturgis, S.D. The young producer first attended a Range Beef Cow Symposium when he was 12 years old. He returned as a presenter to last year’s event in November.

Timed AI

The Blairs first started using timed artificial insemination (TAI) in the early 2000s. After trial and error, they settled into using the 14-day CIDR® protocol for heifers because it tightens up the second cycle — allowing them to heat-detect an AI on second cycle, too — and results in a 70%-75% conception rate in 28 days. For heifers, he said, they use Kamar® heat-detection patches on the first cycle.



PHOTO BY TROY SMITH

► Chad Blair said Blair Bros. Angus Ranch isn’t afraid to use new technology, but with careful evaluation, they use the technologies that best align with their goals.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BLAIR BROS., ANGUS RANCH

► “Technology allows us to be a least-cost, value-added producer. We were able to expand the ranch and bring in the next generation without sacrificing,” explained Chad Blair (left).

The ranch started using AI on cows in the early 1990s, when there weren’t many TAI protocols, he noted. Natural heat detection was time-consuming and tedious. More recently, they’ve had good results with Select-Synch + CIDR + TAI on their cows. He added that CIDRs allow them to set up multiple groups of cows in the same week, and breed 3.5 times the number of cows compared to breeding on natural heats with the same amount of labor and time.

Select Synch required them to detect heat prior to administering progesterone. It was a

cheaper option, but not as time-efficient with multiple groups, he admitted.

Blair said, in his experience Aling on first and second service under this protocol, 77%-87% of the cows conceive to AI in 28 days. The younger groups are more challenging, with conception rates in the lower part of that range. Older groups may reach more toward 90% conception.

Ultrasound

Blair Bros. Angus Ranch also uses ultrasound technology. They bought their own machine, an Ibex Pro, and learned how



► They ID their late calvers by dyeing the hair on the shoulder, which makes them easy to find and sort.



As part of the *Angus Journal's* full meeting coverage, you can listen to Chad Blair's presentation at <http://bit.ly/1RROyTv>.



to use it themselves. Their machine is battery-operated and dust- and water-resistant, which lets them pregnancy-check when and where they need to. They check pregnancy at 110 days, a practice that allows them to get a good read on second-cycle females that would be 80 days pregnant. They ID their late calvers by dyeing the hair on the shoulder, which makes them easy to find and sort. Early detection of pregnancy gives them a better strategy for marketing.

Synchronization

With their estrus-synchronization program, Blairs' heifers generally calve within 22 days and cows calve within 32 days. The synchronization allows them to plan for how many females should calve at a certain time. This lets them move females up to the barn when it is time to calve, which is especially helpful when bad weather is expected.

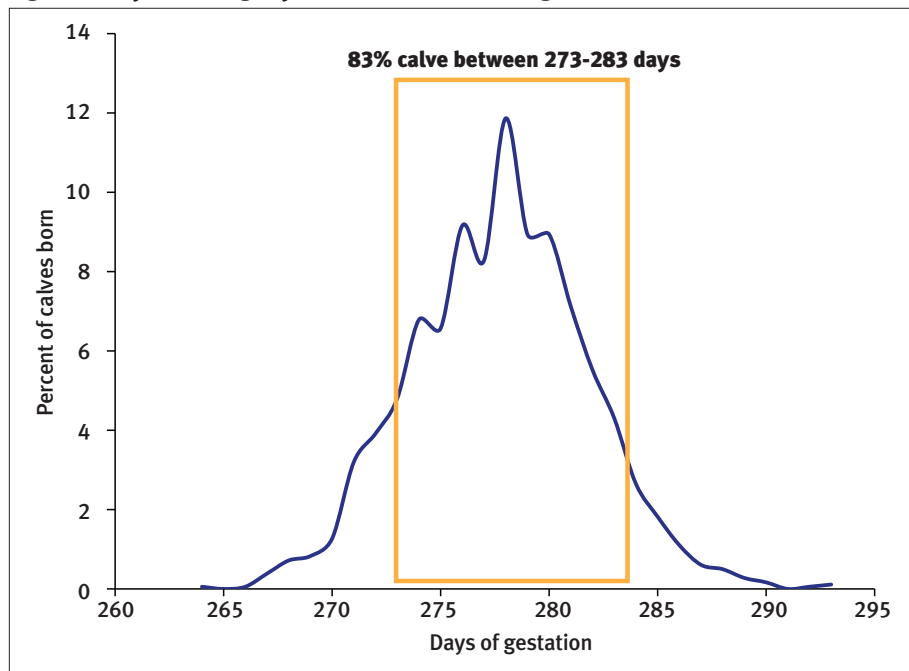
About half of the first-calf heifers would breed back as 3-year-olds before they started a balanced nutrition program for bred females. Now, with a proper nutrition program, they get 65% of heifers to breed in the first cycle, and 10% more in the second.

He iterated the advantages of synchronizing their females. It limits the amount of labor required. Continual calving makes for a hard month, but they lose fewer calves because that is their focus. It also gives them large groups of same-age calves, which improves their vaccination effectiveness. The cows are at appropriate days postpartum to continue in their system.

Other tools

The Blairs have tried embryo transfer (ET) technology, but their results did not align with their goals. They are currently trying

Fig. 1: Nine-year average synchronized heifer calving distribution



to expand their numbers, so they keep more heifers to breed and AI.

They tried *in vitro* fertilization for the first time in 2015. Blair said it lets them keep cows in production and uses less labor, but he doesn't have any results yet.

Blair Bros. Angus Ranch isn't afraid to use new technology, but with careful evaluation, they use the technologies that best align with their goals.

Editor's Note: This summary is part of the Angus Journal's online coverage of the 2015 Range Beef Cow Symposium hosted Nov. 17-19, 2015, in Loveland, Colo. For additional coverage, to review this presentation's PowerPoint or to listen to the presentation, visit the Newsroom at www.rangebeefcow.com. The Angus Journal's coverage of the event is made possible through collaboration with the event committee and sponsorship of LiveAuctions.tv.

