CATTLE REPRODUCTIVE MANAGEMENT: THREE WAYS TO IMPROVE BREEDING EFFICIENCY

Step 1: INITIATE A COMPLETE NUTRITION PROGRAM

Proper nutrition – including a complete balance of energy, protein, vitamins and minerals – is a key component of any successful breeding program. Minerals and vitamins must be balanced in the diet to optimize reproductive performance. Any deficiencies or excesses can lead to poor cow and heifer health, resulting in decreased reproductive performance.

Todd Bilby, Ph.D., technical service specialist with Merck Animal Health, says, "Keeping cows in good health now, improves the odds of a successful breeding season. Since cows that are not in good health at calving take longer to recover and to start cycling for rebreeding, it’s important to keep them in good health after calving.”

According to results from University of Minnesota research, for each 10 percent of body weight lost before calving can result in a delay of the first heat period by 19 additional days. Thin cows will not recover as quickly after calving and will take longer to begin cycling for rebreeding purposes. Additionally, these cows will have lower conception rates than cows in proper condition.

“Proper management of the herd is essential after calving,” says Dr. Bilby. “If all cows are given the same ration at the feed bunk, uniform conditions will not be the outcome. It’s best to divide cows into two groups according to nutritional needs. This will improve rebreeding success and won’t significantly increase feeding costs for producers.”

Step 2: IMPLEMENT HERD HEALTH PROTOCOLS

Working with your veterinarian to establish a vaccination program, is also essential in improving breeding efficiency. Vaccinations against diseases, such as bovine virus diarrhea (BVD), bovine rhinotracheitis (BR), Lepto and Vibrio, should be given routinely.

Dr. Bilby says, “A modified-live culture vaccine, such as Vista® 5 VL5 SQ, should be given two to eight weeks prior to breeding to help reduce fetal infections, abortions and infertility issues, as well as prevention of common cattle diseases.”

Additionally, internal and external parasite control should be given attention in the weeks prior to breeding.

Step 3: KEEP A CONTROLLED BREEDING PROGRAM

Estrous synchronization has the potential to vastly improve reproductive success, while also improving calf uniformity and calf weaning weight. Dr. Bilby says “Prostaglandins, such as Estrumate® have been shown to be effective for inducing estrus and reducing the interval from calving to rebreeding. The AM/PM rule is still a good approach when checking for heats and breeding. Also, utilizing a robust estrous synchronization program can improve the speed at which you can get a cow pregnant.”

For a successful controlled breeding program, producers must also be diligent when detecting standing estrus and with checking for pregnancy. According to the results of research at the University of Florida, pregnancy determination and culling all open females will increase reproductive efficiency within two or three years.

Additional information on successful breeding tips and programs can be found at http://beefrepro.unl.edu/resources.html.

By following these three steps, producers can increase their chances of a successful breeding season. Nutrition, cattle health and controlled breeding all play an important role in reproductive management.

Estrumate: At 50 and 100 times the recommended dose, mild side effects may be detected in some cattle; these include increased uneasiness, slight frothing, and milk let-down. For complete information on use, withdrawal period, contraindication, adverse reactions, refer to product package.