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Developing Specified and Predictable Replacement Heifers

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the invitation to participate in the Range Beef Cow Symposium XIV. I have attended some of the Symposia over the years and have found them all to be very informative and educational. I congratulate the staff of the four Universities for the contribution they give to the Beef Industry.

My family has a grain and livestock operation in western South Dakota. My wife and I have four sons, who are all involved in our operation.

Developing a cow herd that will produce specific, predictable and on-time off-spring, has always been a challenge for most ranchers.

Buying feeder cattle for our family feedlot operation, that are specific, predictable and uniform in size and weight is just as big of a challenge.

We have always raised commercial replacement heifers and sold part of them at a bred heifer sale. We would pasture breed for 45 days to low birth weight bulls. We would preg test and sell them as a 45 day calving period package.

In 1982, we started a small feedlot and over the years have increased it to a total capacity of 10,000 head. During these years we have been tracking several groups of different ranchers cattle. One of the results that keep showing up is the inconsistency of performance and carcass value within a single rancher herd.

Five years ago we began a partner feeding arrangement with Seidel, Inc. (Ron Seidel) of Bison who backgrounds calves up to 800 lbs. then brings them to our feedlot to finish. Seidel was finding some of the same inconsistency in his operation.

After a lot of discussion we decided to pursue an A.I. commercial heifer program to sell to ranchers who prefer to buy their replacement heifers rather than raise them.

BREEDING PROGRAM

We decided we would select black or black baldy heifers and A.I. them to selected black Angus bulls with low birth weight EPD's and still have high weaning and yearling weight EPD's.
We identify all heifers with an ear tag in each ear. We also record the bangs tag number in case both ear tags are lost.

Ron Seidel has an excellent pie shaped receiving feed pens that worked very well for the breeding program.

In 1994, the first year, we purchased 1500 head of selected black and black baldy heifers. We detected heat and bred these heifers for a 21 day period. We found this to be a very high labor requirement for the 21 days.

In 1995 we purchased 2500 heifers. We selected 1600 heifers to breed and fed the other 900 heifers in the feedlot for the certified Angus Beef program for those that meet the requirements.

We divided the 1600 head of heifers into two groups of 800 head. We fed MGA and injected Lutalyse to synchronize heat at our chosen time. This method proved to require less labor and we ended with a higher conception rate.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION PROGRAM

All heifers are given a complete vaccination program which includes Res Vac 4-S, Ultrabac 7, Brucellosis, Preg Gard 9, and poured with Ivomec.

It is our opinion that a well-balanced nutritional program may be the most important part of our A.I. heifer program.

We prefer to have the heifers on a growing ration at least 60 days prior to feeding MGA. We feed MGA for 14 days and then 17 days after the last MGA is fed, we begin Lutalysing 200 head of heifers a day, for four consecutive days. Within 48 hours after Lutalyse the majority of heifers will come in heat. We will repeat the same operation 2 weeks later on the next 800 heifers.

SUMMER PASTURE

Twenty-four hours after the heifers have been bred, they will be hauled by truck 100 miles to summer pasture, where they will remain until they are sold in December. Research has shown that if you must truck heifers after breeding, the best time is 24 hours after conception.

Fifteen days after the heifers have been moved to pasture, clean-up bulls will be put in for fifteen days. This allows the thirty day variation necessary to have accuracy in ultrasounding.

While on summer pasture, the heifers are moved every three to four days through a pasture rotation program. They are fed a free choice high quality mineral package in covered mineral feeders.
ULTRASOUND

Dr. Ralph Miller of Livingston, Montana, who is the pioneer of aging and sexing bred heifers by ultrasound is a key player in the success of our A.I. program. Dr. Miller has a proven record of extreme accuracy in both age and sex between 60 and 90 day of pregnancy.

By ultrasounding the heifers during the middle and last of August we are able to know how many heifers are bred, when they conceived and what sex the calf is going to be. The open heifers are pulled and taken to a feedlot at this time. The bred heifers are put back on fall and winter pasture with a protein block supplement until we sell them the first of December. If we receive snow before they sell we will supplement their grazing with hay.

ACHIEVED GOALS

We realize this program is not for everybody, however, for the rancher who wants to buy specific, predictable, easy calving heifers and be done calving in two weeks, we have an A.I. heifer program for them.

We have observed over the years and a lot of research has been done on the value of heifers which conceived the very first A.I. service. A heifer that calves on time without difficulties is more likely to continue to breed back and calve on time the rest of their life.

A herd of females with like breeding and all bred to the same bull or similar bulls that calve in a three week calving period will produce specified and predictable calves.

GOALS WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

We want to be able to purchase more heifers with production records to put in our A.I. program.

We want to increase our A.I. conception rate to 75% or more.

We want to eliminate using cleanup bulls, so all heifers sold would have conceived on first A.I. service.

We have been asked by some ranchers if we would feed, care, A.I., summer on grass, ultrasound and return the heifers to them in the fall of the year. After considering their request, we have decided to go ahead next year with a few producers to see if it will work in our program.
SUMMARIZING

We have come along way in the beef industry, but we have a long way to go.

We must produce a more desirable product for the consumer. We must have more consistency in size of carcass, tenderness of meat and less fat to be trimmed.

Twenty years ago the pork industry had about as many breeds as we have in the cattle industry today. They recognized the need to have a more consistent product. I think we need to follow the pork industry.

With the new Grid formula marketing, ranchers are finally getting paid for the genetics in their livestock.

I have heard we need to educate our producer to change to a more consistent product. I feel if you pay them for good qualities and discount for the poor qualities you educate very rapidly.

While our A.I. program has a lot of areas to improve on, I feel it is one step closer to achieving the goal of predictability.