

Cow Country Reporter



December 2015 Volume 7 Issue 12

News from your CEO

In This Issue

News from your CEO

Is she good for another year?

Why we need to let Mother Nature select replacement heifers

Q and A – By Kit Pharo

Lots of moisture and a taste of winter



Cattle Producers Of Louisiana
P.O. Box 886
Prairieville, Louisiana 70769
Website: www.lacattle.org
Toll Free: 888-528-6999

Dave Foster
Chief Executive Officer
info@lacattle.org

Merry Christmas CPL members and families. I have a Christmas present for y'all and I urge you to open it sooner rather than later. This gift may result in thinking differently about your ranching/farming operation or at the very least it will give you something to think about. A little history on how I selected this gift for you. Since August 2015 cattle prices have declined and when comparing current prices with the same time last year, they are \$400.00-\$500.00 per head lower. What can one do to get some of this loss back? Open your present! Ray Archuleta, NRCS is a great resource. Go on line and just type in Ray Archuleta NRCS. He talks about soil health, unlocking the secrets in the soil, green planting, mimic the buffalo (mob grazing, stock density) and much more. He provided this quote from an African

Conservationist which I deem thought provoking, "For in the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand and we will understand only what we are taught". Kit Pharo of Pharo Cattle Co., Cheyenne Wells, Colorado (www.pharocattle.com) has a free newsletter that is informative and concludes with, Less Inputs = More Profits. The markets are tough but being better managers can assist your bottom line. We are in a changing time, nothing is the same but change itself. We saw price records shattered in 2015 only to find ourselves wondering what happened. Let's get together to talk about 2016 and how to position ourselves to add value to our product. Give me a call or email me to set up a meeting.

Have a great and blessed Holiday Season and let me know how you liked your present!

Dave Foster, CEO

IS SHE GOOD FOR ANOTHER YEAR?

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist
At cow culling time, producers often face some tough decisions. Optimum culling of the herd seems to require a sharp crystal ball that could see into the future. Will she keep enough body condition through the winter to rebreed next year? How old is the cow? Is her mouth sound so that she can harvest forage and be nutritionally strong enough to reproduce and raise a big calf? At what age do cows usually start to become less productive? Obviously there is no one set rule to determine when a cow is culled. Nonetheless, understanding "average trends" for cows can serve as guidelines and help cow calf producers cull the herd in a timely and effective manner.

There is great variability in the longevity of beef cows. Records kept by a large ranching operation in Florida in the 1980's and published in the 33rd Annual Proceedings of the Beef Cattle Short Course by the University of Florida Animal Science Department, show how productivity changes over the life of the beef cows. These large data sets, (19500 cows, and 14000 cows in two separate years) compared the average percentage of cows determined to be pregnant based on their age in years.

This data would indicate that cows are consistent in the rebreeding performance through about 8 years of age. A small decline was noted as cows aged from 8 to 10 years of age. However the most consistent decline in reproductive performance was noted after cows were 10 years of age. A steeper decline in

(continued on page 3)

WHY WE NEED TO LET MOTHER NATURE SELECT REPLACEMENT HEIFERS

By: Burke Teichert in Strategic Planning For The Ranch

For some time, I have been an advocate that we cannot select replacement heifers—we should instead let the bulls and Mother Nature select them for us. To do this, I have promoted retaining and exposing most of your heifer calf crop for a short breeding season—no longer than 30 days.

Naturally you will cull the obvious poor doers, the poor dispositions and those with obvious physical trait problems. However, don't assume that you can judge the rest very well.

A number of years ago, a group of us measured, scored and visually evaluated as many traits as we could think of that might relate to a heifer's income-generating capability as a cow. While we did not follow this long enough to draw any definite conclusions, nothing that we measured, by itself or in combination, could predict enough of the economic difference in outcomes to confirm our belief that we could, in fact, select replacement heifers. My observations on many heifers since then have strengthened my conviction that we can't select heifers accurately. But, the bulls and our environment can!

I now do quite a bit of speaking to cattlemen's groups of one kind or another. After one of those talks, I was asked if I would consider using genomic testing to make a first selection of heifers and then use the short breeding season. I responded that I would not, at least not in that order. The next question was, "Why not?"

That question reminded me of my first meeting with the late Bud Williams, noted livestock handling guru. Upon noticing that I was looking for things that I did like Bud might do them, he quickly stopped me and suggested that I should look for and focus on the things that he did differently than I and then ask why he did it that way. So, since I'm suggesting that you do something differently than the typical rancher, the question "Why not?" deserves an answer.

The heifers that you have are what they are; and while you would like them to be as good genetically as possible, those that breed early in their first breeding season have a tremendous competitive advantage over the other heifers in lifetime production—they will breed earlier in subsequent breeding seasons and thus wean a bigger calf and will produce at least one more calf in their lifetime.

All the other genetic traits that you might look for cannot compete economically with early breeding of yearling heifers. Even though I understand and appreciate the power and value of genomic information, I am still unsure of our ability to balance traits economically and to avoid genetic antagonisms.

After pregnancy checking and finding the pregnant heifers, I might then use genomic testing as part of my culling criteria for those heifers as they progress in age, but only if I have an excess of young pregnant cows. If, for example, I were to have an excess of pregnant heifers after culling the typical culls (opens, dries, bad disposition, raised a poor calf, ugly); I might then use genomics to select the next order of culling from the bred heifers or older cows. My inclination would be to keep the heifers and cull a few more cows.

I also recommend "minimal development" of replacement heifers, which means they are treated similar to stocker cattle between weaning and breeding. This results in a breeding weight that will be closer to 55% of expected mature cow weight than the 65% that is so often recommended.

That is another reason to put the genomic testing behind the pregnancy testing. When changing to minimal development and short exposure of heifers, you should not expect a high pregnancy rate; thus the need to keep a high number of heifers. However, selling the open heifers should be nicely profitable. We should remember that yearling operations are usually more profitable than cow-calf operations.

There might be situations where you cannot develop heifers adequately with a "minimal" approach. If that is the case, it is probable that your cows are not a good fit for your environment. Remember, to your cows, the environment is the natural environment plus whatever you add to it. You may need to move toward "minimal" development and reduce the length of the breeding season a little more slowly.

Selecting new bulls to fit the environment would certainly help speed up the process. The right seedstock supplier along with information on the dam and closely related females of bulls should help you select bulls to sire daughters that will fit your environment.

I have recently become aware of a growing number of commercial producers who are raising some or all of their own bulls to reduce bull cost and improve genetic adaptation to their environment. They tend to buy semen or a few excellent bulls to infuse new genetics. Some even insist that no bull can be kept from a cow that has calved later than the first 25-30 days of the calving season, ever. In other words, a bull born to a two-year-old will not be used if his dam does not calve very early as a three-year-old. Genomic information may then be used to help in the final selection of these bulls.

Heifer selection is the starting point for future cow herds. Ideally, heifers will get pregnant in the first 21 days of the breeding season. That's why I like a very short breeding season. Ideally, bulls that are intended to produce replacement heifers should be born to cows that always calve in the first 21 days of the calving season. From there, you make other selection choices and use the tools and technology that are appropriate for your goals.

Remember, the production goal of having high pregnancy rates early in the breeding season year after year starts with heifers that breed and calve early in their first year. This approach begs the question, "Why are you willing to

(continued on page 3)

IS SHE GOOD FOR ANOTHER YEAR?

reproductive performance was found as they became 12 years of age. In other words, start to watch for reasons to cull a cow at about age 8. By the time she is 10, look at her very closely and consider culling; as she reaches her 12th year, plan to cull her before she gets health problems or in very poor body condition.

Q AND A – BY KIT PHARO

Kit@PharoCattle.com

Question: “Hi Kit, I was wondering how you select replacement heifers from your herd – or do you have some suggestions on how I should select my heifers?”

Answer:

Enough articles have been written about the proper way to select and develop replacement heifers to fill a large barn. Guess what? It’s not really that complicated. I don’t know why everyone is so determined to complicate simple matters, but they are.

Weaned heifer calves that have been saved for replacement females will not generate any income for two years. Therefore, ranchers simply cannot afford to invest much money into their development. Rather than place them in a high-input, artificial environment and haul expensive feed to them, we need to treat them like the cows we hope they will become. They need to be out foraging for themselves, with minimum inputs. If a heifer can’t do this, she probably won’t make an efficient and profitable momma cow.

We suggest you retain nearly all of your heifer calves, rough them through the winter and expose them to a bull for a very short period of time. This system will allow only your most efficient and early maturing heifers to advance into the cowherd. Why not let the environment sort out your best replacement heifers? The remaining heifers can be treated as stockers and sold for a profit.

If you breed your heifers to calve when God intended them to calve, you will be amazed at the high number that will conceive during the first 21 days of the breeding season. Even heifers that were cheated during the winter months are able to catch up with two to three months of good green grass prior to breeding. If you end up with more bred heifers than you need, you can sell the extras for a profit. I suggest you let the buyer select from the herd, because he won’t be able to pick out the best ones any better than you.

So what about selection? You and I are NOT capable of doing as good a job of selecting replacement heifers as the environment can do. Form will follow function if we stay out of the way. However, there are a few things that deserve to be looked at. Here is my list.

1. Get rid of the outliers, dinks and freaks. In many herds, this includes some of the tallest heifers.
2. Watch disposition. Cull those with flighty and/or nervous dispositions.
3. Look at feet and leg structure. Any problems you see now will only get worse.
4. Select for heifers that shed the quickest. Cull heifers with dull, dead looking hair. This is an excellent indicator of health and adaptability.
5. If you still think you need to do some more culling and/or selecting, you can look at conformation. I prefer heifers that are shorter, thicker and easier fleshing. The more pounds per inch of height, the better. I cull heifers that look long, because that means they are gutless. Contrary to what show ring judges tell us, body length is an optical illusion. I also cull heifers that are coarse and/or masculine in appearance.

Keep the pressure on... We run our replacement heifers with our mature cows. They receive no special care. We calve our heifers out on open range with the cowherd. This continues to force the inefficient and unadapted females out of our program. The sooner you identify the heifers that can’t make it, the better. Every replacement female should have to earn a place in the cowherd.

*Merry Christmas from our herd
to yours!*



WHY WE NEED TO LET MOTHER NATURE SELECT REPLACEMENT HEIFERS

accept a lower conception rate on yearling heifers to find those that will breed early?” The answer is: the open heifers are growing and will gain more pounds per acre than cow-calf pairs and will usually generate more profit per acre than the cow-calf pairs. You then have a life-time bonus in cows that will tend to calve earlier and wean bigger calves.

Burke Teichert, a consultant on strategic planning for ranches, retired in 2010 as vice president and general manager of AgReserves, Inc. He resides in Orem, Utah. Contact him at burketel@comcast.net.

LOTS OF MOISTURE AND A TASTE OF WINTER

By: Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

Thanksgiving week was wet across many parts of the country and included snow, freezing rain and rain. Oklahoma and Texas straddled the freezing line with a wide range of impacts in a region known for highly variable weather. South and east of the freezing line, Southeastern Oklahoma and northern Texas were the epicenter of heavy rain that totaled up to one foot in parts of the region. Flooding once again impacted an area that received record rainfall earlier in the year. The band of heavy rain extended from southwest Texas north and east through the Great Lakes, covering the central and eastern Corn Belt and more.

The moisture this week should remove lingering dry conditions in the heartland and the lower Mississippi valley. The northern Plains and Rocky Mountain regions also received significant moisture in the form of snow and freezing rain. As a result, the eastern three-quarters of the country are in very good shape as far as moisture is concerned; with no significant drought areas across most of the country. The far west and Pacific Northwest also received some moisture in the form of rain or snow at higher elevations. Severe drought conditions continue in the region but the recent moisture should slow or halt drought development in the region with mountain snowpack increasing the potential for improved conditions next spring.

The wet and freezing conditions are impacting cattle in the Southern Plains. Across much of Western Oklahoma, central Texas and the Texas and Oklahoma Panhandles, moisture arrived as freezing rain. Most cattle in the region did not have winter hair coats and the wet hides and cold temperatures that followed are having nutritional and performance impacts on both feedlot and grazing cattle. Depending on the weather that follows, the cold and/or muddy conditions across both the Southern Plains and Midwest feedlot regions may temper fed cattle gains and weights in coming weeks.

The driest winter wheat areas of Oklahoma in the north-central part of the state received two to four inches of rain last week. This is the first widespread abundant moisture in the region this fall and, along with warmer temperatures forecast for later this week, should prompt rapid wheat growth. Though wheat forage has developed slower this fall than earlier projected, there may still be demand in December and perhaps after January 1 for stocker cattle for wheat grazing; especially for producers looking at grazing out wheat due to low wheat prices. The cold, wet and muddy (flooded) conditions right now are creating nutritional and management headaches for stocker and cow-calf producers across the state and may impact the final couple of weeks of fall calf marketings in early December.

CATTLE PRODUCERS OF LOUISIANA
P. O. BOX 886
PRAIRIEVILLE, LOUISIANA 70769
WEBSITE: WWW.LACATTLE.ORG
TOLL FREE: 888-528-6999