

# Noble Foundation Livestock Information



## Replacements Key To "Smart" Restocking

by Clay Wright

Many producers were forced to destock through summer and fall of 2006 due to the drought. Though often painful, it also was an opportunity. If we were smart, we used this chance to increase herd uniformity, culling "outliers" and emerging with a herd more uniform in size, breed type and stage of reproduction. Why is this good? First, a limited calving season of 90 or fewer days contributes more to efficiency and profit potential than any other management practice.

Restocking offers new opportunities for ranchers to improve their herds. That's a strong statement, but the drought emphasized the disadvantages of a year-round calving season, especially in the areas of marketing, herd health and nutrition. Second, there are significant price advantages to calves uniform in age, size, breed make-up and that are marketed in larger groups.

Since ranchers are traditionally optimistic, we now are thinking about restocking before the next growing season. Buying replacements that maintain or increase herd uniformity should be a primary focus of this effort. This is our second chance to be "smart." Consider these recommendations.

Define a 90-day calving/breeding season appropriate to your resources and management. Buy mature replacements that will calve as early as 30 to 45 days before to

no later than half way through the calving season; bred heifers should calve at least 30 days before the beginning. Replacements that will calve late in the season will most likely always be late and have a higher risk of not rebreeding at all. Also, late calves are lighter at weaning.

If you have a uniform majority in your herd, and that cow size and breed have been productive for you, buy replacements that fit that majority. If not, define a cow type appropriate to your resources and management, and make your replacements fit this definition.

Finally, remember that body condition is critical to calving success and eventual conception. Buy spring-calving replacements in a body condition score (BCS) of at least 5; preferably 5.5 to 6. If you consider a set of cattle with a 4.5 BCS, discount them at least \$200 to cover the cost of feeding them up to a BCS of 5 before calving and/or lower conception rates at pregnancy checking time. Pass on any cattle below a 4.5 BCS.

The drought of 2006 has triggered a couple of opportunities to increase the uniformity of our herds. First was culling, second is restocking. Plan and be deliberate in selecting females for the future.



## BEEF: What does this mean to you

by Shan Ingram

BEEF. What does this mean to you? Maybe a more appropriate question is what does it mean to the consumer? If we reflect back fifty or

more years, what did the terms beef, pork, and poultry mean to most of the consuming public? Since I wasn't born, it's hard for me to know; however, I think beef was thought of as the premium red meat and consisted of roasts, steaks, and hamburger with occasional barbecue and pots of chili thrown in. Pork was thought of as red meat made up of bacon, ham, chops, roasts, and sausage. An important bi-product of pork was lard. Poultry was thought of as fried chicken or roast chicken and their source was primarily whole fresh chickens. Of course, turkey was the "bill of fare" for Thanksgiving and sometimes at Christmas.

Now, let's think on today's terms. What is beef? Well, it's steak or ground beef or hum...? Pork is still bacon, ham, and sausage, but it's also leaner and being accepted as "the other white meat" - not as an alternative to beef. Poultry has become many things from chicken tenders to buffalo wings and like it or not, is a preferred meat among many young adults and children.

What has happened and who's to blame? I think what's happened is that cattlemen have clung to the past, failed to be progressive and adapt to the present, and failed to change! We still tell ourselves, "Beef is #1, it's the preferred meat." We are still trying to produce a commodity in about the same way as it was produced 50 to 100 years ago. The biggest innovations in the beef industry during my lifetime have been boxed beef and big packing plants.

We are not making changes and we are to blame for losing market share. Recently, there has been a "big push" to solve our declining market share by making beef higher quality, whatever that means, and a more consistent predictable product. We have seen emphasis placed on choice or better grades. Will this

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solve our problems? What about choice beef that is tough or over fat? How long has it been since you saw a "Choice" chicken or a #1 hog? The pork and poultry industries have abandoned the grading concept and are working on ways to improve and merchandise their products. Much of this has been done under private labels. Is our grading system helping us become a smaller "niche market" rather than a staple? Is it an asset or liability?

Do we need to take heed? Are we clinging to the past and ignoring the future? Do we need to spend money advertising beef to people who already eat it? How does the cow-calf producer know what to produce - what market signal are they getting? Think about these questions and then answer this: Are we as an industry spending enough money on product development and research to insure that beef will be a mainstay in the American diet

in the 21st century? What are you going to do about it?

### **Ranchers Can Manage Calving Seasons**

*by Ryan Reuter*



Weather and markets - those two subjects offer tremendous conversation potential for cow-calf ranchers. We spend lots of energy and time providing point and counter-point about these subjects. Unfortunately, all of our debate does very little good. In fact, we can't do a thing about these issues - they are out of our control. While it might be fun to discuss them, concentrating on issues we can manage may prove more beneficial in making our operations achieve the goals we have set.

We have complete control over our

management and when we buy and sell animals (well, maybe the banker has partial control over that). Focus on things you can control. For a cow-calf producer, a big aspect of the operation that you control is when cows have their calves. It can have a tremendous influence on the profitability of your operation. There are three main questions to answer in relation to calving times:

#### **Cow-calf producers can control when their cows calve. When?**

Choosing a time of the year to calve is the first major decision. Early spring (February-March) is the most popular time of year to calve in the Foundation's service area. February-born calves are typically older and heavier when weaned in October than calves born later in the spring. Are there problems with early spring calving? Every calving season has advantages and disadvan-

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tages. One disadvantage to early spring calving is that calves are born and cows must start lactating while still in the hay-feeding season.

Fall calving (September-October) is another option that seems to be gaining popularity. Advantages are numerous, including less calving difficulty, reduced calf death loss and higher calf prices in the spring. A big potential disadvantage of fall calving is that this type of herd requires either more feed or better management than a spring calving herd. A big factor in determining an appropriate calving season is your forage base as it will dictate the amount of purchased supplements required for your cow herd. Also consider seasonality of markets, labor requirements and weather patterns at critical times such as calving, breeding and weaning.

### *How long?*

The length of the calving season is an important decision. Producers use a long calving season (120 days or more) to try to achieve maximum conception rates, which is a worthy goal. Short calving seasons (90 days or less) allow producers to implement more management techniques, such as a more detailed health program, a customized nutrition program, strategic marketing of larger, uniform calf crops, concentration of labor, etc. What is the balance? It is probably different for everybody, but research in Nebraska concluded that a 70-day calving season struck the balance better than either a 45-day or a 120-day calving season. A cow's estrus cycle is 21 days long, so each cow should get three opportunities to conceive a calf in a 65-70 day breeding season. If the cow is in good body condition and cycling at the beginning of the breeding season, it would seem the chances are low for her to conceive on her fourth or fifth estrus cycle after she missed three in a row. If she is not in good body condition at the beginning of the breeding season,

either the management needs to be adjusted or the cow needs to be culled. Neither of those options necessitates lengthening the breeding season.

### *How do you get there?*

Changing calving seasons can be a tricky proposition. One must realize the fact that moving cows up (ex. from April to March calving) is very slow. We typically have a hard enough time getting cows to calve every 12 months, much less every 11 months. Conversely, moving cows back (from spring to fall calving) is very expensive when "down" time is taken into account. Options for moving your herd include buying/breeding heifers for the season you would like to convert to. Over time, your herd will gradually switch to the desired season. This will necessitate two calving seasons for most producers, which might not be a bad thing anyway. Dual calving seasons can reduce bull costs and spread marketing risk and labor, but they also increase the management requirement.

Strategically consider if your current calving season is the best option for you. It may well be, but a simple change in this area could result in a significant increase in the amount of money that winds up in your back pocket.

## Handling Cattle In The Pasture And Corrals

*by Ryan Reuter*

Here are some tips to keep in mind when handling cattle in the pasture and corrals.

### **In the pasture:**

- Remember flight zones. Use just enough pressure to move an animal without sending it over the fence.
- Point of balance. Cattle tend to move forward if you are "behind" their shoulder and backward if you are "in front" of their shoulder. If

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cattle won't move forward in an alley way, try putting down the hotshot and walking by them from front to back.

- Take your time. It is faster to do it right the first time than to do it twice.
- Keep moving. People in motion are easy for cattle to see and relate to. When the motion stops, cattle get nervous. Their instinct is to turn around and clearly see what stopped, because it may be something with big teeth ready to pounce on them. Move back and forth behind a set of cattle, don't follow straight behind them.
- Walk in straight lines, not in curves.
- Guide the front animals, not the middle of the herd. The majority of the herd will follow the leaders.
- Don't stop when you reach an open gate. The cattle should know there is a gate there, so go ahead and put them through it at a reasonable pace. When you stop to "let them find the hole," they turn around and face you because you took all the pressure off. Then you have to turn them around

again and start all over. It is easier just to go straight through.\* Cull animals that are consistently wild or aggressive.

### In the corral:

- Eliminate shadows, trash, chains, etc. These things distract cattle and cause them to balk.
- Don't yell.
- Remove any protruding bolts, nails, sharp corners, etc. that can cut cattle or people.
- Eliminate noisy chutes, headgates, etc.
- Always have an escape route in mind.
- Don't fight a cow that gets mad, because one of you will get hurt. It doesn't matter if "the cow wins."
- Remember that cattle like to go back where they came from. Use that to design facilities that help you get cattle into crowd tubs, to sort cattle, etc.
- Don't overfill the crowd tub and lanes.

- Don't put a back-up gate right at the entrance of the lane from the crowd tub. It will cause cattle to balk. Put it one body length up from the entrance.

- Hotshots are a big can of worms. I think about hotshot use like this: Imagine that the hotshot has a short in the handle, and every time you shock a cow, you get shocked yourself. You can still use it when absolutely necessary, but that will cut out unnecessary uses.
- Take your time. We want to be efficient with our time, and we don't want to stress animals by making them stand longer than they have to. However, unlike the Olympics, there are no gold medals handed out for who does it the fastest. Oftentimes, that cow would have moved if you had just waited two more seconds before using the hotshot.
- Before you go to handle cattle, discuss the plan and the goals with your crew. ■