

Extension Notes

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AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

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How to Shorten the Breeding Season

It's pretty easy for most beef producers to understand that the more calves they sell, the more money they are going to make. Gross income and profitability are driven by the reproductive rate. So, reproductive management is an important but sometimes overlooked aspect of beef cow-calf operations.

A high reproductive rate in the herd increases the number of calves and can also increase weights at market. A tight breeding season can lower labor costs and the overall cost of production by increasing feed and other efficiencies.

The most limiting factor of reproductive rates in Kentucky is heat stress. Some 95 percent of beef operations in the state calve in the spring and still have endophyte-infected fescue in their pastures. That combination leads to the potential for heat stress in the summer, which results in lower pregnancy rates and calving rates.

University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment studies have shown that as you extend your breeding season later into the summer, you reduce your chances of having high reproductive rates. Studies have shown that very few UK cows get pregnant after June 20. So, it is important that most of the breeding is done within the first 30 days of the season.

Most producers have cows that will need special attention. About a month before the breeding season, take pen and paper and head to the pasture. Write down the tag numbers of all your two-year-old females. These cows are not going to be as reproductively efficient as older cows. Also, write down every thin cow, because they are less likely to be as reproductively sound as those carrying more weight.

Finally, identify all your late-calving cows. These are the cattle that may need assistance to bring them into cycling. Addressing the needs of these cattle with some form of progestin can shorten the breeding cycle as well as increase the pregnancy rate in your herd.

Producers can use progestin either through a feed supplement or an insert. It is important when using a feed additive to ensure that the cattle are actually eating the feed.

A cycling cow already has progestin, so it is unnecessary to use it with them.

For more information on beef cow-calf management contact the Carter County Cooperative Extension Service. Educational programs of the Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion,

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Upcoming Events:

- **Private Pesticide Applicator Training** – Monday, April 15th @ 5:30 PM – Call 474-6686 to register.
- **Northeast Area Livestock Association** – Tuesday, April 23rd @ 6:00 PM – Topic: Equipment Maintenance; Speaker: Dr. Josh Jackson, UK Biosystems & Engineering