

very important to communicate with the people that we are working with. So many times veterinarians will communicate with the people they are working with but they do not communicate with the management or the people who are really paying the bills. I think that it is nice in these types of situations where we have consultation reports that each time we are there we write down what we have done and the things we have checked and point out the things that we have saved them money and how we have paid our way because if we do not tell them, no one else is going to and they like to know what they are spending their money on. I think that this is a good tip, if you will just take time to make yourself out a little professional form and leave that for those people when you leave, I think it will help a lot. Along with that, I recommend a monthly consultation form so that you can summarize all the things and they can see what is being done. Take part in their management meetings and their foreman meetings so that you can have some input and they can realize what really you can do for them.

Cow/Calf

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One of my real interests is what has been called herd health management. I do not care what you call it, it is involvement with your client. Involvement to the extent that you know what their program is and you know what their problems are and you can get a handle on their problems and offer them advice that will economically benefit them because as their returns on investments become smaller and smaller and the veterinarian's costs become higher and higher, we are going to lose our place in agriculture if we do not try to shift the way we practice so that we are an economic advantage to our clients. To me in a beef herd health program, what we are trying to achieve is maximizing the pounds of calf that the rancher has to sell at the end of his production year. There are only two ways that I know that you can achieve this. One is to increase the number of calves and the other is to increase the weight of those calves. I am not interested tonight in this short period of time in discussing the methods of doing either of these. Rather, I would just like to suggest some information which should be reflected in herd records that will help a practitioner and his client put a handle so to speak on reproductive efficiency in his herd. Something that you can really sink your teeth into. Information that will tell you not only what you have but where you are headed, information that you can use before it is too late. These are really pretty simple things but I wonder how often we fail to look at them in an analytical manner. Let me just list them for you.

First of all, the percent cows found to be bred at pregnancy diagnosis. Second, the percent calf crop after the first 20 days of the calving season. Third, the percent calf crop final. Fourth, weight of cows. Fifth, weaning weights of

the heifers. I think these five things used together and given some thought can go a long way to tell you if you are having a problem now or if you are going to have a problem in the future; in the next production year. Let's just look at them again, very shortly, individually.

Percent cows bred at pregnancy diagnosis. So many times when veterinarians do pregnancy diagnosis, they go out, they go through the procedure, tell the man how many bred cows he has, and he leaves. When you find a herd that has a low conception rate on pregnancy diagnosis, this is the ideal time to talk herd health management. He has a problem, it is apparent, and it is a time that he is going to be most receptive to suggestions for improvements in his operation. What are the reasons that you have a low conception rate or a low pregnancy diagnosis? There are lists of them and they involve a whole scope from nutrition to re-production disease to infertile bulls, to poor management, too long a breeding season, they are tremendous. This one thing in itself does not help you limit or help you diagnosis the problem. You have to have more information. *Percent calf crop*, in the first 20 days, is also a big help. It becomes more of a help every year you have this recorded, because if your percent calf crop the first 20 days one year was 50% and the next year it is 30, then you had better start looking pretty quick because the next year it might be 20%. You may have a reproductive disease, you may have a nutritional problem, but you had better start looking and if you look at that period of time, the first 20 days of the calving season, you can probably make some management changes or some preventative medicine changes within that herd that will help you bring this back up next year. Because you still have time from the first 20 days of your calving season to the beginning of your breeding season where you can make some very significant changes in the health of the herd, be it nutritionally or testing your bulls or whatever it may need to be, you have time to do it. *Percent calf crop final* is something that I do not think people understand. I think I talked to so many people who said "I got a 98% calf crop doc," but when you talk to them that is after they have culled their cattle after pregnancy diagnosis, or they did not count those cows that they culled during the middle of their breeding season because they had lameness problems or death losses or whatever. They only counted the number of cows they had when they weaned their calves. This is not calf crop percentage. The true definition of calf crop percentage is the number of cows at the beginning of the breeding season divided by the number of calves weaned alive. This will give you more information so that when you put it together with your other data it starts to make a little more sense. If your calf crop percentage the first 20 days is down, but your average calf crop percentage for the year is stationary, to me that is very suggestive of a nutritional problem but possibly a vibrio problem. If it is a vibrio problem, it is probably one that has been in the herd for a while. Probably there is a certain degree of immunity in that herd or you would see substantial losses at the end of your calf crop. What about

weights of cows, how can that help? I do not think that we can weigh all our cows. What I like for my clients to do is take a percentage of all our cows, maybe 10%, put a separate color ear tag in their ear so when they come through the chute they are easy to cut to be weighed later. You do not have to be watching for a number, you just look for that color tag and you have only 10, 20, or 30 depending on the size of the herd. Cut them to one side and weigh those cows twice a year. Weigh them at the peak of the nutritional season and weigh them a month or two prior to the breeding season. If you have substantial weight losses from the cows primed until just before breeding season, you have some real problems. In our area we are breeding most of our cows in the spring - from the middle of March through June, July, calving in December, February, March, and April. We try to get these breeding seasons limited but that is a problem in itself. By breeding in the spring, especially when you start breeding in the early spring, you have just gone through the two periods of the year when their nutritional level is going to be at its lowest and in our area that is fall and winter. So you have really to pay attention to the cow's condition and especially as far as excessive weight losses if you are going to prevent a disastrous breeding season. If you have someone on a limited breeding season, especially if you have really had to twist their arm to go to a limited breeding season and you come up with a little bit of a drop in the fall or winter, and these cows lose a lot of condition, they do not breed well and you come up with a lot of open cows at pregnancy diagnosis, they are really going to rake you over the coals about that limited breeding season that you have got them on. A lot of these people believe that a late calf is better than

no calf at all. I do not believe that. You really have to pay attention to the condition and I think sometimes the only way that these ranchers really know if their cattle are losing weight is to weigh a few of them. So many people come to me in February and say that they do not know what happened, but just in the last 30 days I will bet my cows have lost 200 pounds. It is something that has started back in October or November but they just wake up to the fact that those cows are not bloomy like they were in the summer and late spring.

Weaning weights of heifers is an economic asset to your herd, meaning she calves as a two year old. You better know what your weaning weights are and you had better have goals set for reaching breeding weights. If your weaning weights are down one year, then you had better get ready for a feeding program to get those heifers up to breeding-weight or else forget about replacement heifers for that year. It might be better off if you sell your complete heifer crop and go out and purchase some replacement heifers from someone else. That may be the cheapest route to go.

Records are probably something that most cow/calf operators hate to talk about. Something that they hate to get into. And really, it takes several years of keeping records before you can convince most of these guys what an asset they will have. I have had people that have kept records for several years and decided that they are too much trouble and then when they realize that they have lost their handle on maintaining some type of knowledgeable basis on where they stand, they go back to them. It is only through you that they really begin to appreciate what records can do for helping them maintain their calf crop percentage and their economic effectiveness.