

Reproductive Performance Records

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Beef cattle production has been handed down from father to son through many generations and is the last field of agriculture to utilize new and innovative techniques. The cattleman is characterized by being independent and has not benefited by agriculture. Throughout the years, he has done things the same way his father and grandfather did them and has been reluctant to accept outside help or advice. However, with today's economy and tight money, the cattleman, in order to survive, has been placed in the situation of seeking advice on ways to improve production and cut costs. For the veterinarian ready to accept the challenge, a new role of herd health management can be developed.

Veterinary consultation will involve several factors. Foremost is understanding the objectives of the producer. Veterinary medicine and health of course are important, but additional emphasis should be placed on nutrition, genetics, and management. Besides knowing the objectives of the producer, consultation will require a thorough knowledge of the total farming operation so cattle work can be properly scheduled. It is also important to know the personnel involved. Often times, changes are more easily made and new ideas utilized when implemented by the people more directly involved with the livestock operation.

Reasonable goals and objectives should be set by the consultant and evaluation of the herd's performance on a periodic basis should be made to check the progress in obtaining those goals. For the general brood cow operation in the Southeastern United States, a 94% calf crop is to be the goal from a 90 day breeding season. A maximum of 2% death loss during gestation and birth, and 2% death loss from birth to two months of age is a reasonable goal. After two months of age to weaning, no more than 1% death loss should occur and weaning weight of 500 lbs. should be obtained.

Because of the money squeeze in cattle production, it is important for the veterinary consultant to be aware of production costs. In our area, it generally costs \$190-\$200 per cow/calf unit in cash flow and \$290-\$310 in total costs. To carry weanlings to heavier weights, the cash costs are close to 21¢/lb. gain and 40¢/lb. gain in total costs.

For the past three years, I have been involved with a large commercial cow/calf operation which is part of a corporate farming venture involving various row crops, a farrow to finish swine program plus 900 brood cows. The cows have been roughly divided into three to four groups according to age, breed, conformation, and geographic location.

Every spring, the brood cows are evaluated for pregnancy, age, and physical defects and culled from the

herd according to their condition. The majority of the cull cows are because of nonpregnancy but many were also culled because of age and cancer-eye. The following four charts indicate the conception rates of the herds on individual bases over the past three years.

Herd #1	Total	Bred	%
1981	187	176	94
1982	159	146	88
1983	157	149	95

Herd #2	Total	Bred	%
1981	168	144	86
1982	178	155	87
1983	155	142	92

Herd #3	Total	Bred	%
1981	389	338	87
1982	522	438	84
1983	377	288	76

Heifers	Total	Bred	%
1982	90	51	57
1983	128	122	95

Year	Total	Bred	%
1981	888	800	90
1982	949	784	82
1983	820	701	85

After each year's pregnancy check and culling procedure, the figures are evaluated to see where problem areas occur and how they can be corrected. As an example, 1981 was a dry year and the nutrition was subpar and pinkeye problems were extreme during the late summer and into the fall. The following year many of the cattle were not bred and approximately 22% of the cattle were culled because of eye problems. The occurrence was mostly in the Hereford breed and the resulting information indicated a more desirable cross breeding program could be obtained without using Hereford bulls.

With more emphasis placed on bull selection judged by test performance, the weaning weights increased every year.

Year	Steers	Heifers
1981	476	454
1982	487	465
1983	535	485

Some of this increase was also influenced by better nutrition. Nutrition was also the major factor in the increased conception rates of the 1983 heifers.

Evaluation of the bull power proved to be very worthwhile. In the first year, 25% of the bulls were culled because of inadequate semen quality or other abnormalities, many of which were related to damaged genitalia. Each year bulls were culled, indicating breeding soundness evaluation is a must for cattle operations looking for maximum production.

Year	Total	Culled	Poor Semen
1980	55	14	3
1981	40	7	3
1982	43	2	1

Several sources of support personnel are available to the veterinary consultant. The veterinary school staff, specialty

organizations such as the Academy of Veterinary Consultants and associations such as the AABP all have information which can be used by the consultant. Others such as state extension services and diagnostic laboratories can be invaluable with their assistance. Often times the consultant can coordinate the efforts of several of these groups to the benefit of the beef cattle producer.

Consultation can be a new challenge for the practicing veterinarian if he is willing to make the effort required and maintain the dedication it takes to practice preventative herd health and become closely involved with management of the herd. The beef cattle industry is in a period of change and the veterinarian has never had a better opportunity to become involved with total production. Further emphasis by organizations such as the AABP should be directed toward consultation by veterinarian.