

Last week we discussed one of the most important factors in improving calf crop percentage- nutrition. This week we will continue this discussion and talk about different reproductive issues that can impact calf crop percentage. One of the most frustrating things a rancher will face is bull infertility. Often, it isn't discovered until it is too late, like in the scenario below.

A rancher turns his recently purchased bull out on his cows for three months. At the end of the breeding period, the bull is removed and the cows are left with adequate grazing. After calving season ends, the rancher does some calculations and finds that less than 65% of his cows had calves. The herd has been vaccinated against reproductive diseases, so he feels sure that disease is not the culprit. The cows have free choice hay and are in adequate body condition score, and the bull appears to be in good health as well. The rancher is frustrated and very confused.

Unfortunately, this scenario is not far-fetched or uncommon. Cases similar to this occur frequently, but can likely be resolved with one management change- bull testing.

A common misconception is that all bulls, especially young or virgin bulls, are fertile. This is not always true. To avoid the problems that the producer faced in the above scenario, it is important to fertility test bulls within 6 weeks of turnout. Fertility tests should be done on all breeding age bulls that are intended for your herd, regardless of whether or not they are virgins.

Another precaution the rancher should have taken before putting his bull on the cows is to have the bull tested for trichomoniasis. Trich is a disease that can cause infertility and abortions in cattle. Because there are no outward signs that indicate infected cattle, it is important to have newly acquired bulls tested for trich prior to the start of breeding season. However, because trich is venereal, virgin bulls will not have this disease and do not need to be tested. Trich testing should also be done if the calf crop percentage is less than 85%, like in the above scenario.

Although the rancher made a few mistakes by not fertility or trich testing his bull before turnout on the cows, he was wise to have his cattle on a yearly vaccination program. The recommended vaccine to use is ViraShield. This vaccine helps protect against respiratory and reproductive diseases and should be given as an annual one dose booster on all cattle in the herd. We believe this vaccine, which is safe to use on pregnant cows, is most effective when used before calving season begins.

The potential losses that may occur are far too large to justify not testing bulls prior to turnout. To have your bulls fertility and/or trich tested, or to purchase vaccine to start your herd on a yearly vaccination program to aide in prevention of reproductive disease, please contact us.

Thanks,

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