May 2015 Eastern NE Cow Calf e-Newsletter

Calving Distribution Key to Reproductive Success

It's only natural as the season shifts to spring to focus on the immediate tasks at hand such as processing calves and cows, moving cattle to summer pasture, and planting corn and soybeans. However, before we take on the spring and summer workload, take one more look at your calving records as a way to measure and improve herd management.

Kris Ringwall, North Dakota State University Extension Beef Specialist, stresses using your calving distribution as a management tool. Here are some of his comments. Analyzing how many calves are born during the calving season can provide valuable insight into the reproductive performance of your cow herd. But when those calves are born in the calving season is just as important. Count the number of cows that calved within 21 days from when the third mature cow calved. After that, check the number that calved the next 21 days and the next 21 days. Keep counting until you get to the end of the calving book.

Why? The no. 1 indicator that cows within your cattle operation fit your production system is timely reproduction. In other words, they calve on time.

The type of cattle operation is not important, nor is when the calving season is set. What is important is that at least 60% of the mature cows expected to calve do so within 21 days of the start of the calving season.

The calving distribution table allows a producer to follow how cows are calving within the calving season, as well as the percentage that are calving within 21 days, 42 days, 63 days , 84 days or later within the herd. These percentages can be compared with the benchmarks for overall herd evaluation or utilized to follow how individual cows calf within the herd.
The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association members enrolled in the Cow Herd Appraisal Performance Software (CHAPS) program average 62% of their calves born in the first 21 days of the calving season; 86% by day 42 and 95% by day 63. These are benchmarks to compare your herd too.

If you don't have the CHAPS program, the calculations are easy to figure directly from the calving book. Simply count the total number of mature cows that calved and note the number on a separate sheet of paper. Then go down the calving book and highlight or circle the third mature cow that calved. Disregard the first calving heifers. Then count down 21 days from when the third mature cow calved and draw a line there, as well as at 42 days, 63 days, 84 days, etc. By counting the number of cows within each segment of the calving book and dividing by the total number of mature cows that calved, the percentage of cows calving at 21, 42, 63, 84, etc. days is calculated. The first calf heifers are not included in these calculations because oftentimes the bull turnout dates are quite different from those of the mature cows.

How many of your calves are born after 63 days? 84 days? University research at the University of Nebraska and South Dakota State University shows that cows calving in the first 21 days of the calving season have a lifetime production advantage of nearly two calves over cows calving later in the calving season. Late calvers tend to always be late calving cows. Those late calving

cows are costing you money. A goal to strive for is to have each cow have a calf every 365 days. That means you need a calving season no longer than 82 days at the maximum.

Management questions to consider:
Do I use a calving distribution table as a management tool?
How many of my calves are born in the first 21 days? 42 days? 63 days, etc.?
What percent of my cows calve late?
Why do I have late calving cows? Do they fit my production system?
How can I shorten my calving season?