

The Value of Pregnancy Checking

Nationally preg checking is one of the most underutilized management practices available. According to the 2007 National Animal Health Monitoring System report only 20% of all operations pregnancy test their cows. Are you in the 20% that preg check or the 80% that don't?

Checking cows for pregnancy is an essential component of reproductive efficiency. Preg checking provides an immediate opportunity to cull subfertile females from the herd as well as taking a closer look at the late-breeders. By increasing the pregnancy rate in your cattle, you also increase your efficiency and improve the sustainability of your operation.

The most obvious benefit of knowing which cows are open is cost savings. With carrying costs being greater than \$2 per day over the winter, there is a lot of value in getting them off the feed bill. A second benefit is to identify the late breeders. These cows are the least likely to breed when feed conditions are challenging and have a tendency to always be late breeders. Keeping them in the cowherd just extends the calving season.

However, focusing only on the open cow misses part of the value of the procedure. Using the information to manage the pregnant cows for optimum fertility can pay dividends in this high calf market.

To effectively use the data to manage cows in the dry period, there are several more pieces of information you want to collect besides cow ID and pregnancy status: cow body condition, weight if scales are available, condition of teeth if an aged cow, udder and hoof condition, any injuries, lameness or other signs of external problems like a bad eye or poor disposition and estimated days pregnant.

Pregnancy checking can be a tremendous decision making tool. Are there thin cows that need to improve in body condition before calving? Are they first calf heifers or older cows? Can I group them together and feed them to gain weight? Did my second calf heifers breed back in a timely fashion? Are there cows that need to be marketed even though they are pregnant (late calvers, poor disposition, bad udders, etc.). Should I fatten up my open cull cows before selling them? What are the estimated number of calves to be born in the first 21 days of the calving season? How many by day 42? How many by day 63? How does this compare to last year? Did I have adequate bull power? How can I manage my feed resources to match my calving season?

Removing open cows from the herd always pays dividends. Additional profit can also be generated by culling lower-performance or later-calving cows. Reproductive efficiency is the single most important factor affecting productivity and profitability, and the success of the breeding season is most affected by how cows were managed in the dry period before calving.

Economic sustainability of your operation depends on efficiently managing your cows to get an optimum return on your efforts. Using data gathered at preg checking will help to improve production efficiency and longevity of your cow herd and can have a positive impact on calf health.

Management questions to consider:

Do you preg check your cows?

If not what is the main reason for not preg checking?

Which factors play the biggest role in my decision to keep or cull a cow?

How does my pregnancy rate compare to last year?

How many of my second calf heifers bred back in a timely manner?

How many late calvers do I expect?

What is the cause for late calvers in my herd?

How well do I use this information to make decisions for my cow herd?

Here are some [resources that you may find useful.](#)

- [UNL Beef website: beef.unl.edu](http://beef.unl.edu)
- [UNL BeefWatch \(monthly e-newsletter that you can subscribe to\):
http://newsroom.unl.edu/announce/beef](http://newsroom.unl.edu/announce/beef)
- [UNL BeefWatch Podcasts \(these are more intimate chats with some of the authors of the BeefWatch articles, you can also subscribe or download them\):
http://beef.unl.edu/beefwatch-podcast](http://beef.unl.edu/beefwatch-podcast)
- [AgriculturalWithDrLindsay.com: livestock and agriculture blog by Lindsay, timely topics \(subscribe on the webpage\)](http://AgriculturalWithDrLindsay.com)

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