On The Ranch

Nebraska Grazing Conference

August 9-10, 2016
Kearney, NE

Many presenters from multiple states will be on the program for this 16th annual event.

http://grassland.unl.edu/nebraskagrazingconference

Selecting Replacement Heifers

By Bruce Treffer, Nebraska Extension Educator

Replacement heifer selection can affect the profitability of your herd for years to come. Photo courtesy of Troy Walz.

When going into the heifer pen to decide which of the calves stay in the operation and which are sold, producers are making choices that affect the profitability of their herd for years to come. A crystal ball would sure come in handy as we never really know the outcome of alternate choices.

One strategy is to sensibly develop and breed the entire group of heifers and then select those that breed early, or wait to cull until after they wean their first calf. While this would give us a better projection, it isn't practical for most to add that many females to their operation for that long.

Here are some selection tips from retired UNL Professor Jim Gosey, UNL West Central Beef Reproductive Physiologist, Rick Funston, and UNL Beef Genetics Specialist, Matt Spangler.

1 – Cull daughters of problem cows. This includes cows that needed help calving, were late calving or that had bad dispositions.

2 – Cull lightweights, big birth weights and 6-frame heifers. Big doesn't always mean bad. If she's big because she is older, you want to keep her.

3 – Along with that, select heifers that were born during the first 45 or better yet, the first 21 days of the calving season. "Cull the youngest heifers."

4 – Select daughters out of the oldest cows. This goes back to information that is being learned about fetal programming and the fertility in those cow lines. Cows that offer longevity will most likely produce heifers that also offer optimum pregnancy rates.

5 – Identify and cull the nervous or "upheaded" heifers. You don't need to knowingly add disposition problems to your herd.

6 – Try not to keep any feet and leg problems. Too much set to their hocks isn't good but really straight-hocked or posty-legged heifers are a bigger problem.

7 – The value of genetic testing mainly lies with determining the heifers' sires, if they are not already known. Keep daughters from bulls that have favorable EPD's for things like stayability, lower input costs, sensible mature size, higher heifer pregnancy, moderate milk, calving ease, docility, etc.

8 – If you are in a commercial setting with baldies, select heifers that have pigmented eyes and udders.

It's not likely every heifer kept will be a great cow but at least the deck can be stacked in your favor.

Make Pasture Fertilizing Pay

Spring is approaching and cool-season grass pastures are starting to green-up. We should begin thinking about fertilizing.

Grass growth is stimulated by nitrogen fertilizer just like other crops. Although nitrogen fertilizer can be expensive, favorable cattle prices greatly increase the potential to profit from the increased grass growth produced from nitrogen.

Our Nebraska research shows that you get about one pound of additional calf or yearling gain for every pound of nitrogen fertilizer applied. With grazing land becoming scarcer and expensive, boosting yield with fertilizer should be especially valuable this year.

However, this fertilization rule-of-thumb assumes that the amount applied is within our general recommendations, which are based on the potential amount of extra grass growth expected. This is affected mostly by moisture. More importantly, it also assumes that your grazing management will efficiently harvest this extra growth.

If your animals graze continuously on one pasture throughout the season, much of the extra growth is wasted. They trample, manure and foul, bed down on, and simply refuse to eat much of the stemmy grass. Less than one-third of the extra grass ends up inside your livestock.

To make fertilizer pay, cross-fence pastures to control when and where your animals graze. Give animals access to no more than one-fourth of your pasture at a time, letting the rest regrow. Graze off about one-half of this growth before moving to another subdivision. Maybe even save one subdivision for hay. If your pastures aren't subdivided, fertilizer dollars might be better spent on cross-fences and watering sites.

Follow these suggestions and more of your pasture growth will be eaten, and more profits will come from fertilizer and pastures.

Written by: Bruce Anderson, UNL Forage Specialist

Early Graze To Control Weeds In Native Pastures

Have you noticed any green-up in your pastures? This usually is a good sign, except when the green is weeds in warm-season grasses.

Early weeds should be controlled in warm-season grass pastures. Weeds remove moisture that could be used for grass growth later on and they remove valuable nutrients from the soil. Early weeds also can develop so much growth that they can shade, smother, and reduce early growth of your summer pasture grasses.

Herbicides like glyphosate as well as prescribed burning can control many early weeds, but I think another method actually is better — grazing. Heavy, pre-season grazing costs you nothing. In fact, you get some feed from these weeds while herbicides or burning would only kill and remove growth. Plus, this early pasture might be especially valuable if it gets your cattle out of mud or saves you from feeding expensive hay this spring.

Pre-season grazing will not harm your summer grass — provided you stop grazing before new grass shoots get more than a couple inches tall. This usually doesn't occur until late April or early May in southern Nebraska and slightly later as we move farther north. Early, pre-season grazing of warm-season grass also removes some old growth from last year, which starts the recycling of nutrients trapped in dead plant tissue. In fact, about the only bad news about early, pre-season grazing is you have to get fences and water ready earlier, you need to move animals to the pasture, and you won't completely kill out these weeds in one year.

Funny thing, though. These so-called weeds might actually make pretty timely and valuable pasture. Give pre-season grazing a try, I think you'll like it.

Written by: Bruce Anderson, UNL Forage Specialist