

Range Beef Cow Symposium XX

Dec. 11-13, 2007 • Larimer County Fairgrounds and Events Complex, Fort Collins, Colo.

You Can Calve in June

by Barb Baylor Anderson

FORT COLLINS, Colo. (Dec. 15, 2007) — Rancher Paul Redd has made Mother Nature his partner. Redd, who manages 1,200 cows on 250,000 acres of public and private land on the Colorado-Utah border, now calves in June.

Wednesday, Dec. 12, he shared his experiences with attendees of the 2007 Range Beef Cow Symposium hosted by the cooperative extension services and animal science departments of Colorado State University, South Dakota State University, the University of Wyoming and the University of Nebraska Dec. 11-13. The event was at the Larimer County Fairgrounds and Events Complex near Fort Collins.

“We finally admitted we were violating our own principles, after 50 years,” he said. Half of Redd’s cows produce registered bulls and heifers for an annual April bull sale. The other half are commercial cows. The cows winter on the desert and summer in the mountains.

“We were using Mother Nature to help us find the best-producing cows by culling those that did not wean a calf each year,” he said. “We decided to build a cow herd adapted to work efficiently in our environment.”

At the same time, Redd said, they ignored the high cost of forcing an arbitrary calving date.

“We wanted March/April calves,” he said. “The ‘green’ started in March, but there wasn’t enough to get a mouthful until May. Cows were calving when there was not enough quality forage to support her and her new calf. We knew that. We were forever trying various supplements and/or



► Paul Redd

PHOTO BY TROY SMITH

substitutes for the range, adding \$50 to \$150 per cow per winter.”

Redd changed to June calving for his commercial cows to lower costs, use less labor, have less stress on cows and cowboys, and provide more markets and options of what and when to sell.

“We use less supplements,” he shared. “In the past four years, our cows have received only a mineral with urea. In order to have good reproduction, the cows must be in good shape, a 5 or better on body condition score, at calving and breeding.”

Redd said June-calving cows need much less attention, which saves on labor.

“Cows still must survive the spring, the long walk to water and range forage that is sparse and weathered. But, without a calf

at side it is easier,” he explained. “We have better-milking cows. The calf is born easier, and [the] calf survival rate is better. The calf is dropped in green pasture in warm weather.”

More market options and marketing flexibility with younger, lighter calves is also a plus. Redd said June calves have time to meet many different markets and different market dates, including being sold off the cow, going to pasture or going to the feedlot. He sees a stronger calf market, even a premium, for his four-weight calves over five- and six-weight calves. Often, four-weights gross more per head.

“We cannot brag about the weaning weights of our calves, but we can feel good about their weight per day of age and how well they sell,” he said.

The downfall, he added, is pregnancy rates are 2%-4% lower than previously.

“We hope to provide higher quality feed by returning in September and October to re-growth in pastures grazed in June and July. Some forage should still be growing with better overall value,” he said. “Even though we experienced lower pregnancy rates, our total number of calves weaned per cow bred increased slightly due to better calf survival. We would not give up the lower expenses, lower labor, lower stress, greater marketing options or the improvement in quality of life.”

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Editor’s Note: API coverage of the Range Beef Cow Symposium XX is made available for distribution to all media via an agreement with the Range Beef Cow Symposium Committee and API. Headquartered in Saint Joseph, Mo., API publishes the Angus Journal and the Angus Beef Bulletin, as well as providing online coverage of events and topics pertinent to cattlemen.