

Range Beef Cow Symposium XX

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Breeding Success “Is in the Details”

Attention to detail is the secret to a successful herd synchronization and AI program.

by **Kindra Gordon**

FORT COLLINS, Colo. (Dec. 13, 2007) — It doesn't really matter which synchronization or artificial insemination (AI) protocol you choose to use. The key to getting cows bred is paying attention to the management details, University of Minnesota animal scientist Cliff Lamb said during his presentation Wednesday at the Range Beef Cow Symposium XX. The event was at the Larimer County Fairgrounds and Events Complex, Fort Collins, Colo.

Lamb offered several key points on which producers should focus to enhance reproductive efficiency within their herds. Foremost, he said, is emphasis on nutritional management among heifers and cows.

“Don't think that a synchronization program will get cows cycling if they've had poor nutrition,” Lamb said. “You'll struggle and be disappointed if your cows aren't in good body condition at the start of breeding.”

He suggested the common rule of thumb that cows be in a body condition score (BCS) 5 or 6 on a 9-point scale at breeding. He cited research indicating that for good fertility rates it is more important that females be gaining condition prior to breeding, as opposed to simply maintaining.

Likewise, Lamb shared research indicating that fat heifers (BCS 7 or higher) tend to struggle with fertility if they lose condition and then have to regain it to start cycling again. “It takes them longer to start cycling,” he said.



► Cliff Lamb

Lamb also stressed the importance of having cows in appropriate condition at calving.

“Condition in which cows calve is a critical indicator of when they'll come back into heat,” he said. For instance, a cow with a BCS 3 at calving will, on average, take 89 days before she'll begin to start cycling for breed back; whereas, cows with a BCS 5 or 6 will typically cycle within the first 60 days after calving.

“Don't starve your cows through winter and plan to get them to gain body condition

after calving,” Lamb said. “It's too late.” If they are in a BCS 5-5.5 at calving, they will respond better to estrus synchronization programs at breeding.

As final points for the breeding season, Lamb offered these recommendations:

- Minimize stress on the herd. “Stress affects pregnancy rates, ovulation and embryo survival,” he says. Appropriate facilities can help decrease stress to both people and the cattle. He especially suggests the use of a breeding box.

- Follow the synchronization protocols outlined in the AI catalogs. Choose the protocol that suits your operation, and plan ahead because many of the protocols are 31-33 days in length.

- AI all cows. Even if the protocol you use requires heat detection, run all synchronized cows that have not shown heat through the chute and AI them at 72-84 hours. “It will increase overall pregnancy rates by 10-15%,” Lamb said.

“Synchronization will do a great job in herds where the details have been taken care of up front,” he concluded.

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 hosted Range Beef Cow XX. Additional coverage of the symposium is available at www.rangebeefcow.com.

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