

## **Breeding Season Tips**

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Breeding season is upon us as we move into summer. Breeding season can be a stressful time during the year but it's also a great time to assess the herd. Critically assessing the herd can help improve herd genetics, performance, and the subsequent calving season.

Keeping accurate and precise records is a great management tool when preparing for and going through the breeding season. Records to be kept can include the previous breeding season information, such as length, bulls used, and conception rates, and calving season information, such as birth weight, calving date, maternal characteristics, open cows, behavioral issues, and others. Several other records should be kept, such as calf performance through weaning, potential heifer replacements, pregnancy/conception rates, fetal age and pregnancy check, and many others. Having these records to refer to during the breeding season can help make herd improvements.

Breeding season is a good time to make culling decisions for the herd. These culling decisions can be based on the records being kept, such as behavioral issues, opens, poor calf performance, and cows that no longer fit the management. Cows that lose a calf during the calving season or those that did not have a calf should be evaluated for continuing in the herd. There are several reasons cows can lose or abort a calf, so this should be assessed prior to breeding for the next calving season. Culling cows early can save on feed resources needed for grazing during the summer months.

Have a defined breeding season that works for herd management. Cows that fit the environment and management of the ranch should be propagated, those that do not, should be considered for culling. Additionally, a defined breeding season leads to a shortened calving season. Having a defined breeding season also leads to more uniform calf crops in the fall when selling at weaning. For example, a defined breeding season could be the first two estrous cycles, or 45-days in length. Assessing how a defined breeding season length for the herd and management should be considered for both benefits and challenges.

Nutrition is something to always be considered but is especially important for the breeding season. Having cows, heifers, and bulls in good body condition prior to and during the breeding season can lead to greater pregnancy success. Additionally, better nutrition can lead to better milk quality and quantity, which improves calf performance to weaning. When developing replacement heifers in drylots, it's important to consider the adaptation period of the heifers from a higher-energy diet in the drylot and when they are turned out to grass after AI or during the natural service breeding season. The drylot heifers may show a decline in body condition at that time as they adapt to grazing which could compromise first cycle pregnancy rates.

Another consideration for the breeding season is artificial insemination (AI) versus natural service. It is common to utilize AI for replacement heifers and natural service for the cows. Using AI can help improve the genetic base of the herd without having to maintain the bull but also requires additional labor and supplies. Benefits and challenges should be considered when using both AI and natural service to improve the herd.

These are just a few of the considerations for the breeding season. Breeding decisions for the herd are made a year in advance of having a live calf on the ground the next calving season, so there is a lot of care and consideration in these decisions. Over time, you will develop a herd that fits the environment and management of the ranch, but it is not an overnight process. Making small changes each year can lead to positive impacts down the road for both the herd and the ranchers.