Sharon Fox Gamble, Agricultural Agent *FS# 2014-2*

Developing A Controlled, Seasonal Breeding Program – Cattle

An efficient cow spends most of her life pregnant and lactating. Non-pregnant (open) cows, incur much the same feed costs as bred cows. Feed costs represent 70% of yearly cow costs, therefore pregnancy detection, and culling the open cow can represent substantial economic savings.

Performance of calves is a cow culling criteria but accurate comparison between cows cannot be made if the calving season is spread out over too long a time period. Comparing calves of dissimilar ages can lead to can result in the wrong cows being culled. Calves need to have acceptable weaning weights and the cow must calve within a twelve month time frame.

Management is facilitated when cattle are grouped by stage of production and accomplishes many objectives. Cows that are "open" at the same time can be vaccinated and boostered without potential abortions and the "killed" versus "modified live" issue is not valid. Calfhood vaccinations, dehorning, identification, de-worming, and weaning can be done in at one time. Stress on the cattle and labor for you should be much less…and it will be done!

Pregnancy testing and culling open cows can greatly influence percent calf crop and herd profits but it cannot be done efficiently or conveniently with year- round or extended calving seasons. There is ample research to support the efficiency of 75 day breeding/calving seasons. Ninety (90) day seasons is a more reasonable goal and if one were to synchronize their cows, they would have five (yes 5) opportunities to get bred and four (yes 4) if one didn't synchronize their cows. If you have done your part, in making sure the cow herd has had adequate nutrition she should be able to get bred in 4 cycles. If she can't be confirmed pregnant…do you really think she should stay in the herd?

How to Start a Controlled Breeding/Calving Season

Nutrition is the major factor responsible for brood cows cycling and conceiving. Since pastures are usually at their peak quality in spring and early summer, a natural concentration of calving may occur in late winter and spring. No system of getting on a controlled breeding program can completely eliminate the delay of some cows from their current schedule. However, by taking advantage of the natural concentration in a herd, the problem can be minimized as most herds have a natural breeding/calving concentration already.

A system of converting from year-round to a 90 day breeding/calving season over a period of three (3) years would present less loss and fewer problems than to try to convert in one year. The following steps are suggested for getting on a 90 day system.

1) Build a good, strong bull pen or well-fenced bull pasture. An electric fence in addition to regular fence may be needed.

2) Remove bull from herd. Select removal date to coincide with the latest date you want calves born.

3) Assuming fertile active bulls have been used and that there were enough bulls with the herd, sixty (60) days after removing the bulls (or at a convenient time near this date), pregnancy check all cows and cull:

a). all non-pregnant dry breeding age females which have been with the bulls.

b). all non-pregnant cows with calves five months of age or older.

4) Put the bulls back with the herd the first year so that the calving season will be six months long.

5) Start breeding replacement heifers 20 -30 days ahead of the final long-range planned breeding date for your herd. Put bull with mature cows for six (6) months the first year.

6) The second year, follow the same system as outlined in steps one (1) to five (5) except start the breeding season so that the calving season will be about 4 ½ months long.

7) The third year follow the same system as outlined in steps one to five except start breeding season so that calving season will be 80 - 90 days. Also, cull all open cows this year when pregnancy checking regardless of age of their calves. The breeding season may be reduced even further in following years.

The following chart is designed to show how the system could work. The example is developed using the final long-range January to March calving season. Dates could be changed to adapt to different desire calving dates.

Three-Year Plan for Converting From Year-Round to 90-Day Calving Season of January, February, March
(Assume year starts the month the bull is removed from herd)

First Year

Remove Bull June 20	Pregnancy Check Aug. 20	Put Bull back in herd Dec. 22	Start breeding replacement heifers Feb. 20	Remove bull from replace-ment heifers May 1

June ↑ July Aug. ↑ Sept. Oct. Nov. Dec. ↑ Jan. Feb. ↑ Mar. April May ↑

Second Year

Remove Bull June 20	Pregnancy Check Aug. 20	Put Bull back in herd Feb. 1	Start breed-ing replace-ment heifers Feb. 20	Remove bull from replace-ment heifers May 1

June ↑ July Aug. ↑ Sept. Oct. Nov. Dec. Jan. Feb. ↑ ↑ Mar. April May ↑

Third Year

Remove Bull June 20	Pregnancy Check Aug. 20	Start breed-ing replace-ment heifers Feb. 20	Put Bull back in herd March. 22	Remove bull from replace-ment heifers May 1

June ↑ July Aug. ↑ Sept. Oct. Nov. Dec. Jan. Feb. ↑ Mar. ↑ April May ↑