

Culling the Herd

The culling of the herd remains one of the tasks that is difficult for the herd manager. Cows who have faithfully produced year after year but have reached an age where it is time to consider ending her time in the herd have to be evaluated for removal. The final decision can be based on an evaluation of her physical condition at this time of year after the calving season. After nine or ten years the cow enters a class where she could benefit from extra feeding and remain another year or two as a productive animal.

Look first at her body condition after calving two months into lactation. Peak lactation will be reached representing the biggest demand on her body. Pasture grazing will have the effect of improving the BCS. If at this time her BCS is 2 or lower check her teeth and general behaviour in the herd. If she is having trouble now it is better that she is put on the culling list and replaced with a younger heifer. A BCS of 2 means that there is a likelihood she won't rebreed in the next six weeks.

Two forces at play in every beef herd are; the need to have genetic progress and, the need to get a return on the expense of developing a heifer for replacement. The cow pays for herself after three or four calves depending on how detailed and costly the development program is in preparing her as a heifer. After that, the longer she stays in the herd the lower her annual amortized cost for development and the more profitable she is. The goal is a calf every year from every cow. With a culling rate of 12% the herd will be completely refreshed with new genetics in eight to nine years.

For both replacement heifers and older cows special feeding programs can be shaped while observing them over the summer. Cull cows can be placed on extra protein intake for fall to ensure best reproductive performance. Energy from pasture forages are usually sufficient but aged cows can reduce intake for various reasons so plan a precision feeding program using your Bale Pro[®] equipped with chopper and grain tank. A cow should consume about 1100 gm (2.4 lb.) of protein every day of grazing. Fresh pasture is about 30% dry matter and she will eat about 90 lbs daily to get 30lb. of dry matter. Early in the pasture season she will eat about 1500gm (3.3 lb) of crude protein. At the beginning of grazing, fresh pasture grass contains 12%-18% crude protein on a dry matter basis. Protein drops dramatically as the pasture ages and the best grazing material is selectively removed. September or October grazing often means that protein is 5% to 7% crude protein and volume consumed may also drop. November and December grazing is often on forage below 6% crude protein and high NDF content which discourages intake. At this time feeding a straw or hay and grain mixture that is chopped and blended with your Bale Pro[®] minimizes the ability of the cows to sort and they eat the ration that is designed for them. This can supply needed nutrients to build BCS in preparation for the upcoming cold weather. Without supplemental feeding done with accuracy, feed can be wasted or not enough ration can be consumed to meet the extra needs of the cull group. Watch BCS and weather, then adjust extra feed accordingly.

Extra attention to this productive group of cows can gain an extra year or two from the most profitable group of cows in the herd if they are managed appropriately.



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