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### **Don't Pull the Bulls???**

We are at the time of year when I typically encourage folks to establish a set calving window by pulling the bulls away from the cow herd to meet a specific amount of exposure days. That often means that females will be open but tightens the calving window. That said, the females that are bred tend to be the most fertile and ones you'd likely benefit the most from keeping. Although I do still believe that tighter calving windows have benefits to the operation, the value of a bred cow now might make you consider letting the bull continue to do his job and change up a marketing plan for cows this fall.

Leaving bulls with cows for the duration of the summer grazing season might be considered an old-school practice. Pulling bulls after 90, 60, 45 or even fewer days results in calves being born during a chosen window of time. Many producers find the leading advantage of a defined and relatively short calving season is a more uniform calf crop. Come marketing time, calves are closer in age and weight than calves born over an extended period. Other benefits come in managing nutrition of the cows, labor during calving and health protocols related to age of the calf.

Most of the nation's cowherd are spring calving cows, which means that pregnancy diagnoses and subsequent culling of open females happens in the fall. This often translates into depression of the cull cow price in the fall months. Working to change that timing, either through feeding open cows or selling later bred cows, can lead to more potential for operational profitability. Not pulling bulls until fall, with the combination of a veterinarian's pregnancy diagnosis of fetal staging, is an option that may need to be considered.

Not only are there cow marketing benefits, but there is the bull management side of the equation as well. Pulling bulls off cows in the hot summer months can be a challenge. Additionally, finding another place to keep the bulls separate from the cows and potentially separate from each other can lead to management challenges. Not having to manage bulls while allowing them to run with the cows certainly simplifies things in terms of management. One consideration should be early maturing heifer calves that might end up pregnant with this longer bull exposure strategy.

If you do decide to allow extended bull exposure, a plan needs to be put in place to keep the cows that "fit" your operation. This might mean that you sell as bred female the cows determined to be bred past your traditional calving window. This might also mean that you choose to market bred heifers or pairs that are born early, as they often have the highest value within the operation. This strategy can come with some risk, as those early bred females tend to be the most productive and profitable to the operation long term. If the operation has multiple calving herds/windows, simply shifting from group to group can be an option as well. Let group size and benefits of a tighter calving window govern decisions.

Producers may have to keep bred cows for a while to hit the most favorable market. If so, are there adequate feed resources to manage these cows? Often, cheaper gains can be put on bred, non-lactating females through the fall, with crop residues and other lower cost forages become available. Keep in touch with markets and shoot to capitalize on traditional seasonal high points. We are in a time of record prices and strong demand for bred females, what makes good sense this year might not in future years and vice versa. Be ready to adapt and change to market signals.

Cow depreciation, or the cost to put a cow into production, minus salvage value, divided by years of production; often indicates that it takes five or six calves for a cow to become profitable to the operation. This logic is based upon an open cow of lower value, leaving the operation. By adding value to her salvage value, through selling a bred female, cow depreciation cost can be decreased. This might allow less productive cows to be sold sooner and increase the overall production efficiency of the herd. All these points need to be considered whether you decide to pull the bull, or not.