

APPLICATION OF SYSTEM CONCEPTS IN COW-CALF MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

It is certainly a pleasure to be here today as a part of this panel, and I hope what I have to say will be of help to a lot of you. What I would like to do is give you a brief overview of our operations, then tell you what our herd health program is as it applies to the cows and calves, and relate to you a series of events that led us to the decision to implement this program.

OVERVIEW

Our cattle are located in Madison County about five miles West of Cherry Lake on State Road 150. Our place is sandy to sandy clay loam and our grasses are improved bermudagrasses such as Coastal, Tift 78, Alicia, and Pensacola Bahiagrass. We produce purebred Braford cattle the foundation of which are Adams Ranch cattle from St. Lucie and Osceola counties. These cattle have been in Madison County for about nine years now. Thirty-five to 40% of our male calves are retained for sale as coming two-year-old bulls and about 60% of our heifers are retained. The top end of them will go into our herd and the rest of them offered for sale, usually as bred heifers. The balance of the calf crop, both steers and heifers, are either sold at weaning or retained as stockers to utilize our Winter grazing.

We produce our own hay, plant oats and rye on prepared land, and ryegrass and a small amount of arrowleaf clover are overseeded into our bermudagrass sods. We feed a protein supplement to the cow herd during the Winter if we do not have green

grazing for them. We supplement our bulls and heifers that we are growing out with a high roughage feed, some corn and protein meal, and a lot of cottonseed hulls, peanut hulls or similar materials.

PRESENT HEALTH PROGRAM

Around November 1 when we bleed our herd for recertification, the entire cow herd is dewormed, deloused, de grubbed, and vaccinated for BVD, PI3, BRSV and IBR, 8-way Blackleg, Vibrio/Lepto, and H. Somnus. The cows calve mid-December through March. About 85% of them calve by the end of February. In mid-April, we work the calves which include branding, dehorning, castrating, implanting steer calves and deworming. We give the cows a booster vaccination of Vibrio/Lepto and deworm.

In mid-July, we work the calves again deworming, vaccinating for BVD, PI3, BRSV and IBR, 8-way Blackleg, Lepto-5, H. Somnus and Pasteurella. Steer calves are reimplanted at that time.

In late August, we weigh the calves, redo the vaccination done in July plus Vibrio for bulls and heifers, and calfhood vaccinate our heifers. Then sometime in September the calves are weaned.

That's a lot more handling than we used to do and it costs about \$8 or \$9 per cow/calf unit. While we think all that handling and extra dollars are worth it, perhaps a little more background will help.

My family had Polled Hereford cattle in North Florida from the mid-1930s until the early 1970s. We wormed our cow herd rarely,

vaccinated our calves only for Blackleg and in later years calfhood vaccinated the heifers. That was a pretty scrimpy health program but we really had no problems with the cattle and they did exceptionally well for us. Actually, there was no indication that anything else was needed. During the mid-1970s, I acquired land in Madison County and in 1981 purchased our foundation IBA purebred Braford cattle. Our program at that time consisted of worming the mature cattle, vaccinating the cows and herd bulls for Vibrio/Lepto, calfhood vaccinating our heifer calves and Blacklegging all our calves at weaning. Up until the Winter of 1989/90, things went pretty well from a health standpoint although we would unexplainably lose an occasional mature cow, usually during the Winter time, and we occasionally had calves that were born weak although usually after they got some milk and got going, they turned out OK.

In late November, 1989, we began losing cows. These cows were mostly in good condition; there were some Condition 4s, but there were also some Condition 6s. By mid-January, 1990, we had lost half of a small herd of Polled Hereford cattle brought in a year

earlier and 4 or 5 of our mature Braford cows. Neither our local vet or the vet school here in Gainesville could identify the cause although they worked mighty darn hard at it. Some of the tests run on the dead cows and also on some of the remaining cows indicated an anemic condition and one autopsy suggested clostridial problems. Our feed all tested OK and the herd was getting an adequate amount of protein supplement and hay.

About that time, Sloan Baker, a friend of mine for many years, suggested I talk with Ed Richey. Ed was of the opinion that we might never find out the exact cause, but felt he could help us design a health program that would control the problem for the future.

The program I described earlier in these remarks resulted from Ed's recommendations. During 1990/91 to date, we have not experienced any more unexplained deaths. Our cows have maintained good condition and the baby calves seem to be much stronger at birth. Figures 1, 2 and 3 diagram our operation and procedures for cows and calves.

I will certainly be glad to answer any questions you might have.

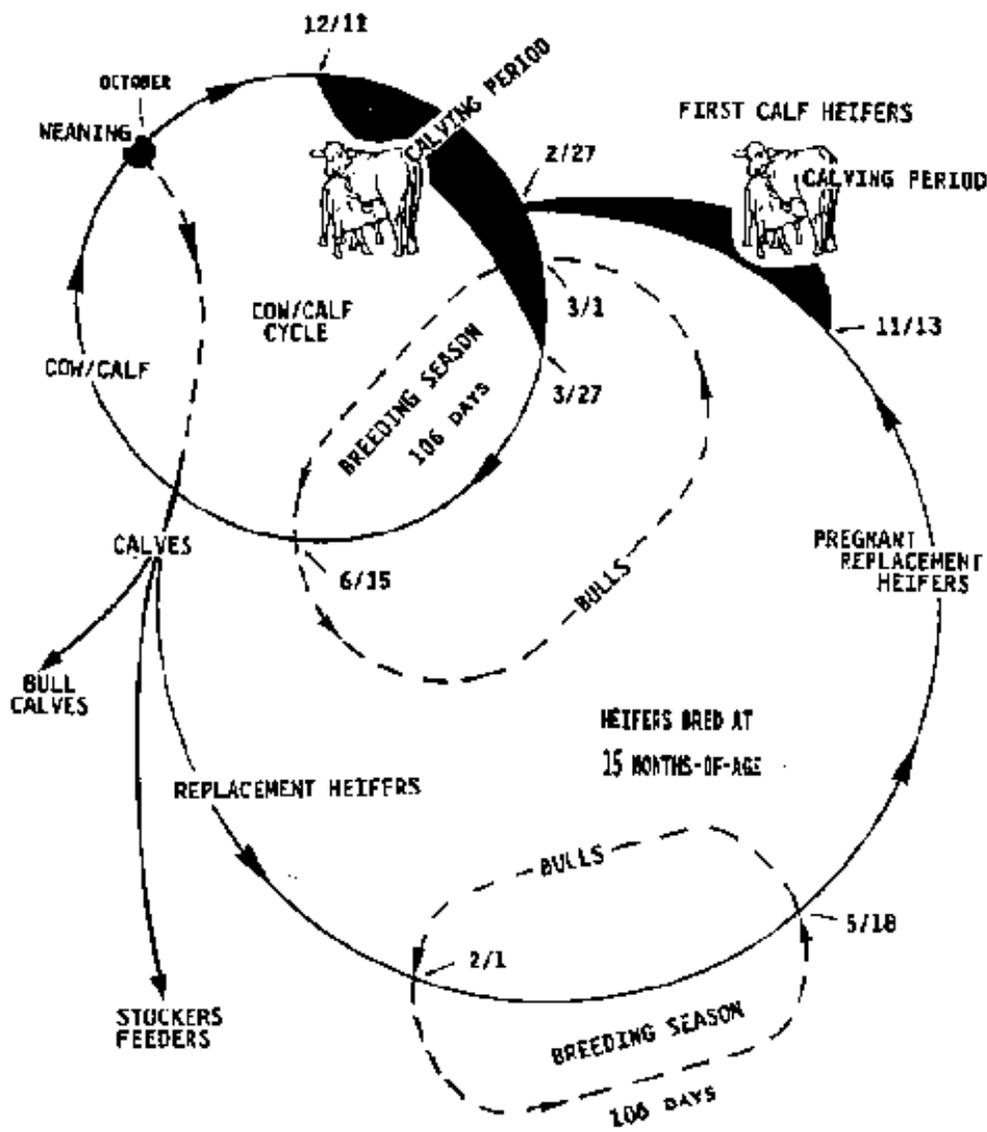


Figure 1. Beef cattle operation at Running M Ranch.

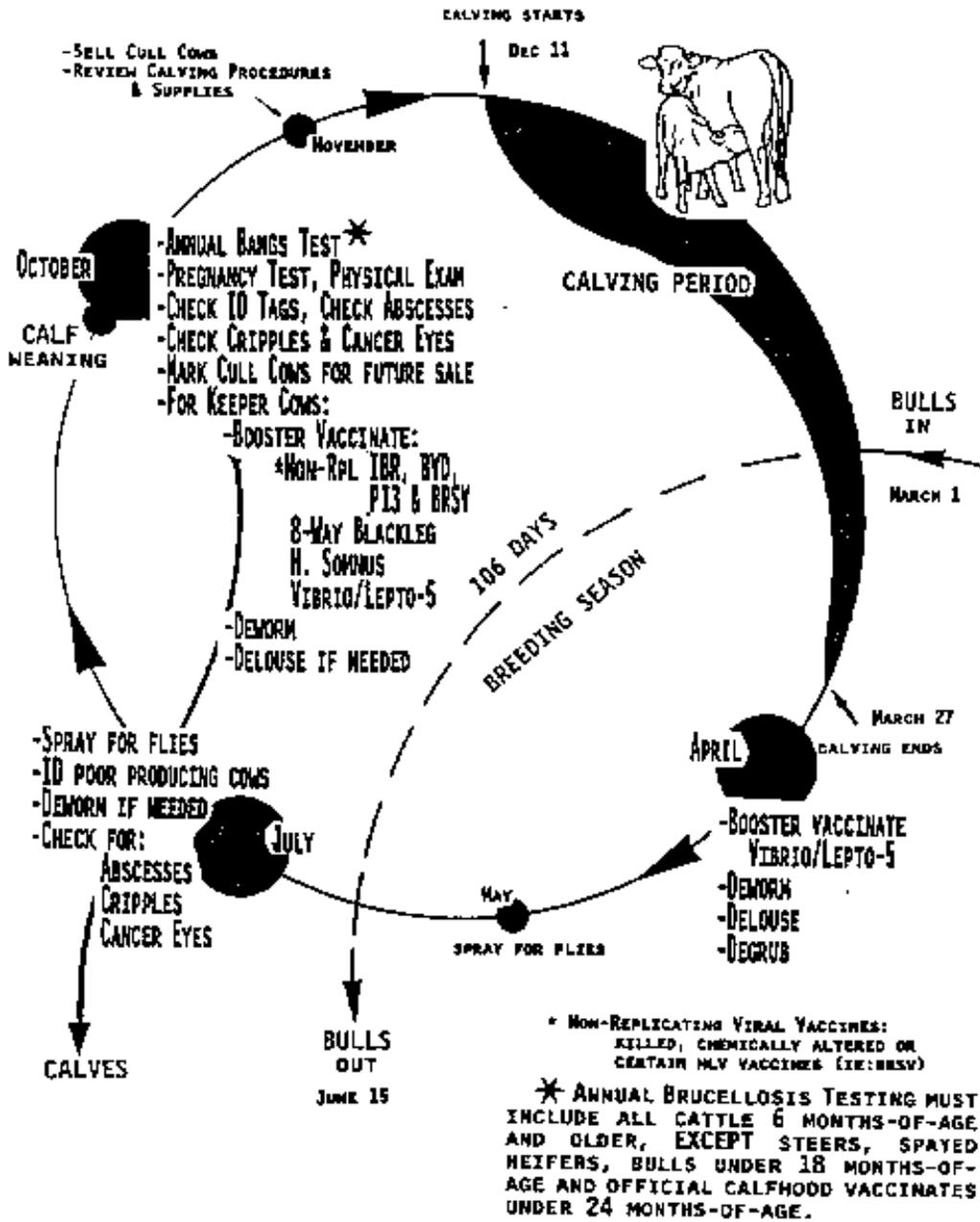


Figure 2. Adult Cow Cycles and Health Programs Working Windows at Running M Ranch.

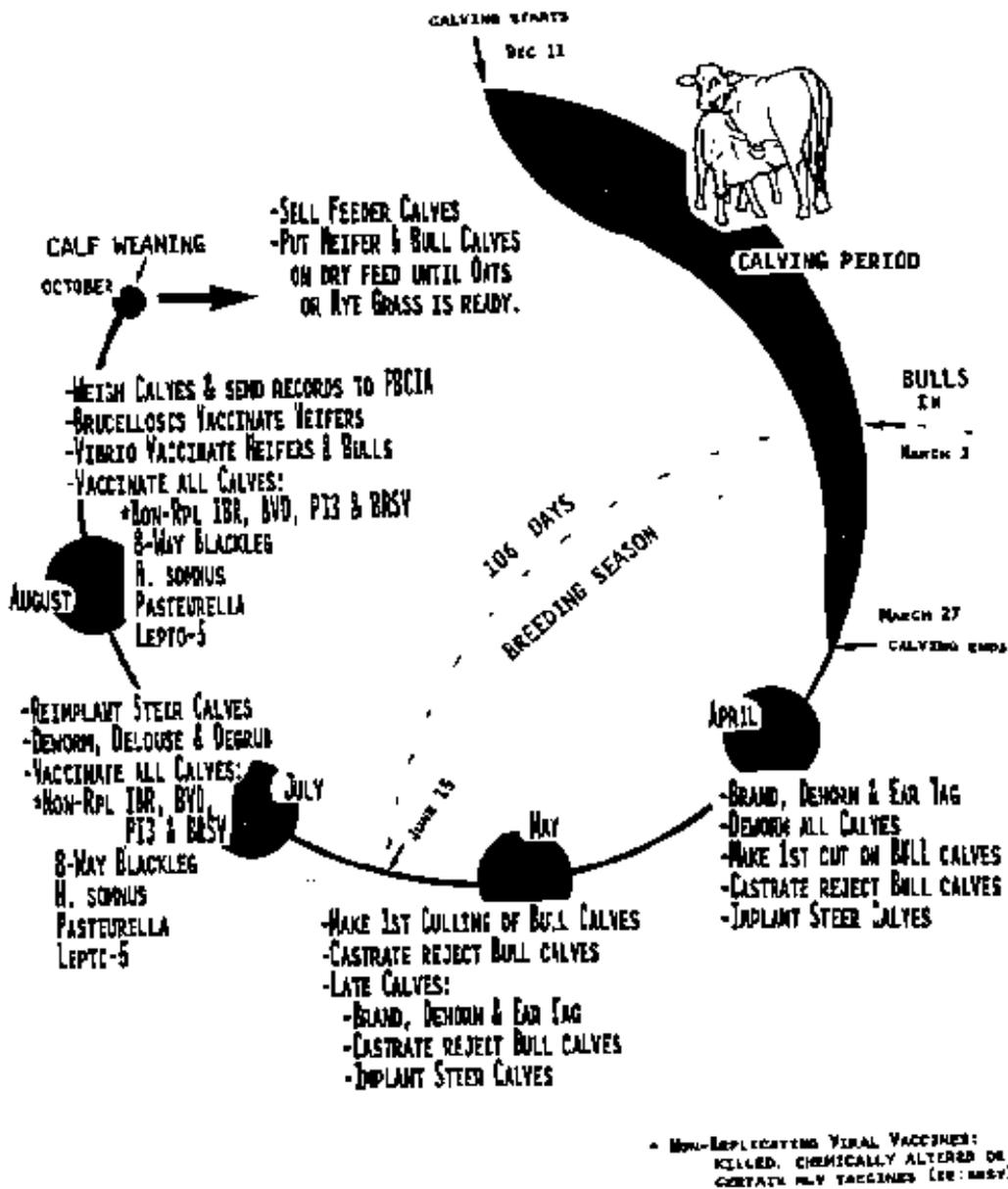


Figure 3. Calf Health Management Procedures at Running M Ranch.