

APPLICATION OF SYSTEM CONCEPTS IN COW-CALF MANAGEMENT

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Several years ago, after shortening our breeding season and raising our herd numbers sufficiently, we began selling calves directly from the pasture rather than through a brokerage or auction market. The main reason was to avoid the discounts levied against Southeastern calves. As long as our calves were being mixed with others before shipment, the discounts would apply, even if our calves were better managed.

Once we started selling direct from the ranch, and began to try to maximize the attractiveness of our calves, I talked to several buyers and found that after quality aspects are considered, performance takes over. I was also assured that buyers are willing to pay for some preconditioning practices including dehorning, castrating and vaccinating to build resistance to diseases calves may be exposed to upon reaching their destination. These diseases, for the most part, were not economic factors at the ranch but the vaccinations are not that expensive considering we are working the cattle anyway. The last thing anyone concerned wants is for a load of calves to have a "train wreck," become sick because of exposure to diseases the animals have no resistance against resulting in heavy losses and/or poor performance.

Buyers seemed to have differing opinions on what vaccinations were essential depending on their experience and geographical location. With this in mind, I contacted the Hillsborough County Extension Office and consulted with Mr. Wayne Wade, Beef Extension Agent. He suggested a meeting with Dr. Ed Richey, IFAS Extension Veterinarian who had considerable expertise in this area. Dr.

Richey could assist in developing a comprehensive health program centering on the marketability of our calves. At that time we were vaccinating all calves with a 7-way clostridial vaccine twice and heifers were vaccinated against Brucellosis.

Dr. Richey suggested a whole herd vaccination program designed to maximize the herd's resistance to all diseases possible and practical. This program is stressed during marketing to try to recover the costs of the program and hopefully profit from it. So far, our buyers have been very pleased with the performance and health of our calves and competition for them at sale time is growing along with their reputation.

Since a calf's first line of defense against disease organisms starts with the colostrum it receives in the first few hours following birth, it becomes important to have as wide a spectrum of antibodies possible in this colostrum. With this in mind, a program of vaccinations was developed to give the cow resistance to as many economic diseases as practical. These vaccinations are administered during the sixth month of pregnancy (July) in the hopes that a high titer will be developed during the final trimester.

Since July is the start of the next year's production cycle as well as being the busiest in respect to health, I will begin there with a brief description of our health program.

In July, calves are sold and/or weaned. At this time the brood cows are tested for pregnancy and Brucellosis re-certification. They are also examined for any physical unsoundnesses such as abscesses, crippled feet or legs, cancer eyes, blind quarters or udders,

jug teats, and broken, worn and/or missing teeth. Cows are dewormed as needed and a pour-on or spray is applied for horn fly and louse control. Cull cows are cut out for future sale and keepers are booster vaccinated against IBR, PI3, BVD & BRSV (killed), 7-way Clostridium, H. Somnus, and Lepto-5. Weaned heifers get the same vaccinations plus Vibriosis.

During the last half of October, the month of November and early December, the health program centers on calving; with cows being checked as often as possible and proper assistance and medication being administered as necessary on an individual basis.

In mid-December brood cows are booster vaccinated against Vibriosis and Lepto-5. Cows are also spot-wormed and either poured-on or sprayed for external parasite control.

Bulls are given a pre-breeding examination on January 1, or as soon after as possible. They are poured-on or sprayed and dewormed as well as booster vaccinated against Vibriosis and Lepto-5. Bulls are then placed in

breeding herds.

On April 1, all cows, calves and bulls are gathered. Bulls are taken to the bull pasture after deworming and treating for external parasites. Any unsoundness is observed and noted. It is at this point that calves get their vaccinations. All calves are dewormed, sprayed and vaccinated against IBR, BVD, PI3 & BRSV (killed), 7-way Clostridium, H. Somnus, Pasteurella and Lepto-5. Heifers also receive a Brucellosis vaccination and steers receive their second implant. All calves are dehorned as necessary.

The accompanying "Adult Cow Cycle" diagram shows this program along with our working calendar (Figure 1). Other cycles were developed for calves and replacement heifers and bulls.

For further or more detailed information contact me, or better yet, get with Dr. Richey and develop a program tailored to your operation.

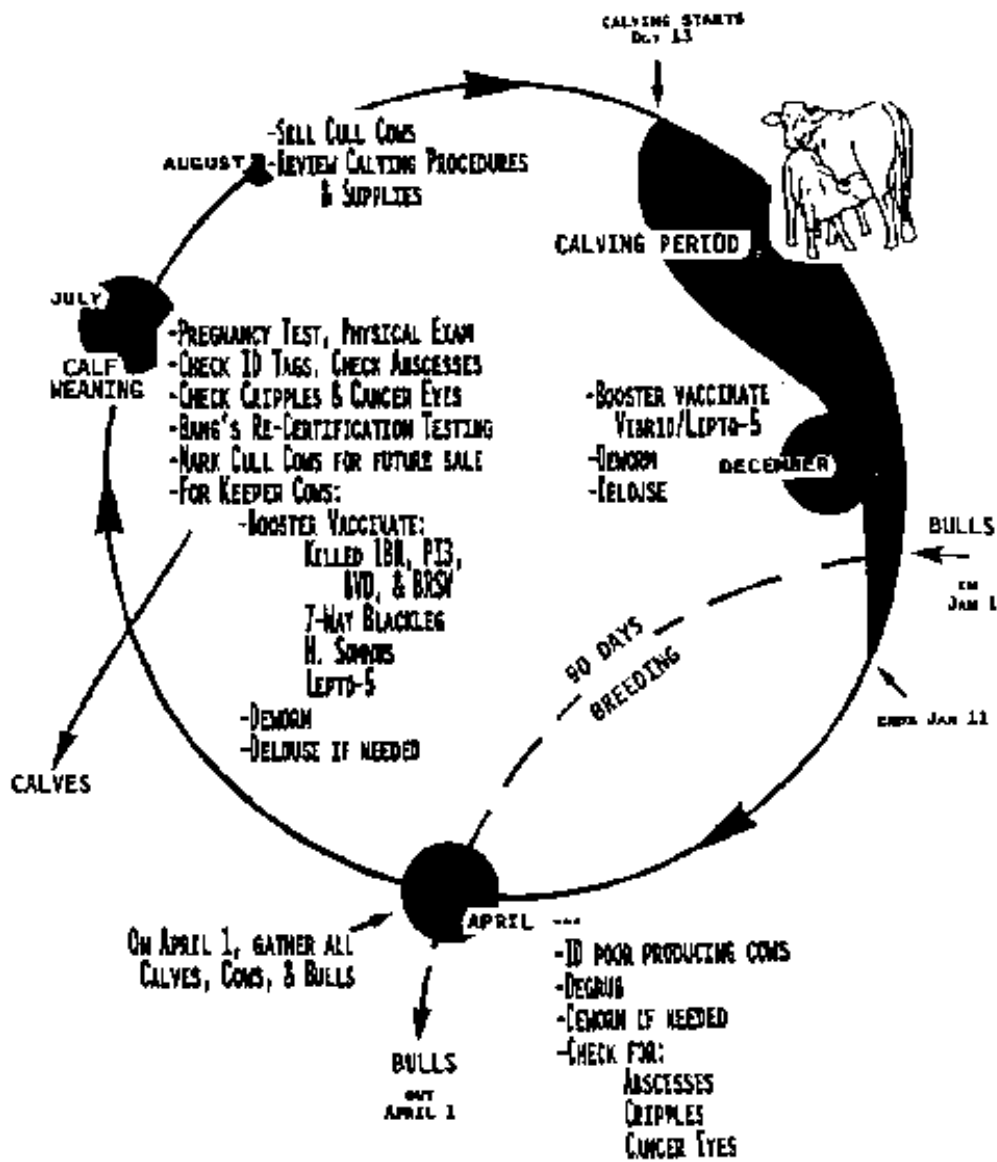


Figure 1. Adult Cow Cycle and Working Windows at Elsberry Farms.