

Bluestem Breezes
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Cow-Calf Producer's Top Ten List for March

We gathered around an old stock tank lined with hay, now turned calf-warm-up-facility, in the shop to warm our own bones after enduring another day of chores amidst less than ideal weather conditions.

I believe the tone of our conversation was rather lighthearted at first; the immense snow has seemed to wear on even the toughest of folks and a chuckle here and there seems necessary for a little sanity boost. The stories involved the odd places cows were finding to calve, including the backside of a combine. And there, the conversation turned to replacement heifer selection criteria.

At times, we are so intense on the jobs at hand we forget to step back and take a birds eye view approach toward our operation. While we are trudging through the snow and mud, why not consider options to make life easier during the next round of storms, or the next season of storms? Do I need... More gravel? An additional gate? A larger gate? Another set of chains? To move the hay stockpile to another location? Another hydrant? And, the list goes on.

Although it is flat out exhausting to endure this weather amidst calving season, always keep your mind running. There are always ways to improve and make our operations run more efficiently.

As you make plans for the upcoming month, here are ten items to consider for your to-do list from K-State Beef Specialist Dale Blasi:

1. Manage calving pens and pastures to minimize human, cow and calf stress. Stay organized.
2. Sanitation is key to reducing and/or eliminating calf scours. An excellent calving pasture management plan by Dr. David Smith from the University of Nebraska - Lincoln, can be found at <http://beef.unl.edu/beefreports/symp-2003-19-XVIII.pdf>.
3. Make sure every calf consumes adequate colostrum during the first 4-12 hours after birth.
4. Keep accurate calving records, including cow identification (ID), calf ID, birth date, calving difficulty score and birth weight. Other traits to consider recording are teat and udder scores, calf vigor score, and other pertinent information. This information along with Angus sire information is vital for enrolling cattle into the AngusSourceSM program.
5. Calving books are essential sources of information; make sure you have a backup copy.
6. Body condition score (BCS) cows. Thin and young cows will need extra energy to maintain yearly calving interval.
7. If cow diets are going to be shifted from low- (poor quality forage or dormant grass) to high-quality forage (lush green grass) programs, begin a grass tetany prevention program at least 3 weeks prior to the forage switch.

8. Given the high price of mineral supplements, conduct a needs assessment of your cowherd. Moreover, closely monitor daily intake to insure that it is consistent with label directions.
9. When making genetic selections, use the most recent National Cattle Evaluation (NCE) and herd records judiciously.
10. If new bulls are purchased, now is the time to start preparing them for their first breeding season. Bulls need to be properly vaccinated and conditioned to be athletic. Moderate body condition with abundant exercise is ideal.

And, plan to attend K-State's Cattlemen's Day this Friday, March 1st. You may register at Weber Hall. By the time Friday arrives, we may all 'need' to wrap up chores and head to town for a few hours. The networking is great and the program line-up is always excellent!

For further information, visit the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.