

Buying Time?



PHOTO: RITA BRHEL

Why You Should Buy, And Not Raise, Replacement Heifers

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

Most cow-calf beef producers can relate to anxiously waiting until the last of the replacement heifers have calved, being on guard day and night in case one of them should have trouble and need assistance in pushing out her calf.

The customary approach to bringing in new cows to an existing herd has been for producers to raise their own replacement heifers, but beef genetics specialist Matt Spangler wants producers to consider a new approach to adding replacement heifers — buying them.

"Medium- and small-size producers need to think about what makes the most sense for their operation," said Spangler, who works at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. He spoke on this topic at several events this winter, including beef seminars at North Platte, Nebraska, and Clay Center, Nebraska. "Commonly they try to ride the fence and produce both market and replacement animals. Unfortunately this can create inefficiencies."

What Spangler has found is that by trying to raise their own replacement heifers, producers who produce primarily market calves have significant difficulty in balancing the maternal and terminal genetics in their herd.

"If your cows excel in the same areas your bulls do, you are not maximizing profitability," he said. "Trying to be 'all-purpose' inherently reduces efficiency and reduces profitability."

That, and most cow-calf producers don't realize that they can purchase re-

placement females for far cheaper than it takes for them to develop their own replacement heifers.

"I would encourage producers to honestly evaluate what it truly costs to develop a suitable replacement," Spangler said.

By purchasing replacement females, cow-calf producers can focus on bull trait selection to fit only one breeding objective: that of the market calf, which are

"If your cows excel in the same areas your bulls do, you are not maximizing profitability. Trying to be 'all-purpose' inherently reduces efficiency and reduces profitability."

MATT SPANGLER

very different than the traits selected to raise replacement heifers. For example, producers of market calves are looking for growth rate and carcass quality, whereas producers of replacement heifers are looking for fertility and calving.

The idea of selecting specific traits for bulls that are very different than the traits selected for cows is something that dates back to the 1970s. The trend has faded away over the decades as breeds were developed to excel at both terminal and maternal traits, and because some bulls can pass on traits idea for both terminal and maternal lines.

But what Spangler is seeing in recent years is a deficit in maternally oriented replacement females. Breeding an all-around good bull to a herd of mediocre cows does not produce as marketable calves as breeding an exceptional terminal bull, or even an all-around good bull,

to a herd of cows whose genetic traits predispose them to excel at mothering.

There are also differences in what bulls and cows bring to maternal traits. For example, culling open cows is not the same as selecting genetics for fertility, because the fertility genes primarily come from the bull. So bulls selected for terminal, or market, means are not the same bulls as would be selected to produce replacement females.

"That makes bull selection easier, because you're selecting on a smaller number of traits, and allows you to make improvements more quickly in your herd since your selection criteria are more focused," Spangler said.

In actuality, cow-calf producers who choose to add a replacement heifer program are diversifying their operation as much as they would be if they added an enterprise completely outside of beef, such as corn or sheep. Therefore, for a market producer to try to raise his own replacement heifers, it's spreading resources, time and energy over two separate enterprises, rather than specializing in one.

"Except here, we're talking about an enterprise that has beef cattle, but deciding to truly excel in one component of beef cattle production instead of trying to do both," Spangler said.

For more information, see:
<http://beef.unl.edu>
www.nbcc.org
www.beefefficiency.org



Feb. 27 Deadline Looms For USDA Water Bank Program

HURON — The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will provide \$4 million in financial assistance for South Dakota, North Dakota and Minnesota, farmers and ranchers to help conserve wetlands and improve habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, control flooding and strengthen rural economies. The funding is available through the Water Bank Program (WBP) and NRCS will accept applications until Feb. 27, 2015.

"The Water Bank Program provides a unique opportunity to keep water on the land for the benefit of wildlife, such as waterfowl, while also contributing to flood control, water quality and rural economies," said NRCS Chief Jason Weller.

Through WBP, landowners receive annual payments through a 10-year rental agreement for conserving and protecting wetlands and adjacent lands that may otherwise be used for annual crop production. The program also helps restore upland habitat for more than 300 species of migratory birds that rely on the Prairie Pothole region for breeding, nesting and resting.

Severe flooding of agriculture land has been a problem in this region and has affected hundreds of farmers. Eligible land for this year's WBP included flooded agricultural land, flooded hay, pasture or rangeland and flooded private forestland.

"Through Water Bank, landowners receive assistance as they turn their perpetually flooded lands into great benefits to our wildlife populations," said Weller.

WBP funding will not cover the cost of conservation practices to enhance wetlands and contracts will not be renewed after the original contract expires. If conservation practices are required to improve migratory bird habitat, eligible landowners and operators can apply to other NRCS financial assistance programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or available state conservation programs.

WBP is part of a larger NRCS effort to help landowners conserve grasslands and wetlands in the Prairie Pothole region. Maintaining wetlands and grasslands in the region provide diverse benefits, including water quality protection, potential flood reduction, carbon sequestration and enhanced wetland and wildlife habitat.

Interested landowners should contact the NRCS at their local USDA Service Center to learn more about the program and submit an application prior to the Feb. 27 deadline. More information is also available on the NRCS Water Bank Program website at www.nrcs.usda.gov under Newsroom/.

Funds For Financing Beginning Farmers Available

PIERRE — The South Dakota Value Added Finance Authority (VAFA) announces tax-exempt bonds are available for qualifying beginning farmers. Bond purchasers can potentially save thousands of dollars in federal taxes by investing in a beginning farmer.

The Beginning Farmer Bond program through the South Dakota Department of Agriculture (SDDA) is available for eligible beginning farmers to purchase agricultural land at lower interest rates.

"To be eligible for the program, an applicant must be at least 18 years old, a resident of South Dakota, have a net worth under \$400,000 and own less acres than 30 percent of the county median," says Terri LaBrie, SDDA finance administrator. "The limit on a beginning farmer bond is \$517,700."

Typically, the Beginning Farmer Bond program works through a local lender; however, if retiring farmers are interested in passing on their land to a beginner farmer, the interest off that contract sale is federally tax exempt providing substantial savings to the seller. Because federal regulations prohibit this type of transaction with closely related parties such as parents or grandparents, a third party lender is required in those cases.

"The bond program is a great way for a beginning farmer to buy land; however, it's also advantageous for a retiring farmer that would be willing to enter into a contract for deed with that beginning farmer or an individual investor looking to help finance a beginning farmer," says LaBrie.

The SDDA administers the Beginning Farmer Bond program through VAFA. The board meets monthly and reviews the applications for the program and issues the bonds for approved projects. Board members include: Bob Hull, Sisseton; Mark Gross, Sioux Falls; Bill Hansen, Centerville; Chuck Jepson, Ft. Pierre; Jim Doolittle, Belle Fourche; Marcia Hendrickson, Chancellor; and Nathan Jensen, Beresford.

For information on the financial programs offered through SDDA, please contact one of the board members or Terri LaBrie, SDDA finance administrator at 605.773.5436 or terri.labrie@state.sd.us.

Ag Drainage Design Workshop In SF

BROOKINGS — The 2015 SDSU Extension Drainage Design Workshops will be held in three locations throughout the region, including Sioux Falls.

The workshops are a collaborative effort between SDSU Extension and the University of Minnesota and North Dakota State University Extension services. Pre-registration is required. Due to seating limitations, onsite registration will not be available on the day of the event.

To register for any of the workshops, visit www.regionline.com/2015Drainage.

The South Dakota Drainage Design Workshop will take place Feb. 17-18 at

the SDSU Extension Regional Center in Sioux Falls.

"These workshops are designed to give producers the information and tools they need, as well as some hands on practice, to feel confident in developing a drainage design whether they plan to do it themselves or contract it out," said Chris Hay, SDSU Extension Water Management Engineer. "We cover the entire design process from the basics of soils and drainage through spacing, layout, grade and pipe sizing."

The two-day workshop begins at 8 a.m. day one and ends at 5 p.m. day two. The workshops will focus

on the planning and design of agricultural tile drainage systems to meet profitability and environmental objectives. The course content is taught in a hands-on manner and with a great deal of discussion time.

The workshop is intended for those interested in a more complete understanding of the planning and design principles and practices for drainage and water table management systems. That includes farmers, landowners, consultants, drainage contractors, government agency staff and water resource managers.

Topics include drainage design fundamentals, legal

aspects of drainage, basics of drainable soils, drainage design software, safety, wetlands and conservation drainage concepts and techniques.

The design topics begin with basic design considerations and progress through individual small-team projects with several hands-on, problem-solving examples covering basic design and layout principles, water flow calculations, drain spacing, sizing and grades. Design principles for lift stations and conservation drainage practices also are considered.

Some Tips For Purchasing A New Bull

EDITOR'S NOTE: Today, the Press & Dakotan debuts a column written by Jake Geis, DVM, of the Tyndall Veterinary Clinic. He will write two columns per month: One will be on farm/agricultural matters and the other will be on pet care.

BY JAKE GEIS, DVM
Tyndall



Jake GEIS

Buying a bull for your cowherd is like buying a new house. You look at dozens of homes, hoping to find the perfect one to fit your needs at a price you can afford. And once you find it, you hope it doesn't fall apart the minute you take possession. Like home buying, we pour through sale catalogues and make phone calls to find our bulls. Then we unload them at our ranch and hope for the best.

Instead of investing a few thousand into an animal and tying a lucky rabbit's foot to his neck to keep him safe, we can do our homework pre-purchase and feel more confident in our bull. Here I'll detail a few points to keep in mind to decrease the risk a

new bull will be a flop.

A good Breeding Soundness Exam (BSE) is a critical first step in a bull purchase. It doesn't matter how fancy a bull looks, if he shoots blanks then he's an expensive hay-burner. While all bulls should have a passing BSE before the sale, it is a good idea to re-test the bull prior to turnout to make sure that he is still good.

The second item to watch for is confirmation. Bulls should look masculine and well balanced. Leg and foot issues often lead to early culling of bulls. Keep an eye out for post-legged bulls, bulls that have weak pasterns or bulls with abnormal hooves. Corkscrew toes are a major problem with some bulls and are genetically linked, so buying a bull with

this defect will cause it to be present in all the heifers you retain as well. And remember that pictures can be photoshopped, so only buy a bull after you have actually seen him move.

Confirmation issues lead directly to a bull's longevity. The more years a bull remains in the herd, the less he costs per calf he sires. Look for bulls that were not pushed overly hard to reach their mature weight and once you have purchased the bull, manage him carefully to maintain appropriate body condition. No matter how well the bull was developed, if he is neglected once he reaches your ranch he will not last long.

With the increased calf prices this past year, bull prices are likely to reach record highs. Don't let the increased cost drive you away from purchasing the bull that fits your herd goals. While one bull may be cheaper than another, cheapness usually manifests itself later in the calves he sires. If the "cheap" bull sires calves that wean at 50 pounds lighter than the more expensive bull, the cheap bull will cost you money in

the end. Look for bulls that have EPDs that fit your herd needs. If possible, using genomic-enhanced EPDs can help solidify your faith in your bull investment.

Make sure the bull you are buying does not bring any unwelcome visitors. Bulls can carry diseases that can cause abortion, even though they show no signs of being infected. Trichomoniasis, commonly called "Trich," is the most talked about disease of bulls that leads to early abortions in cows. Purchasing only virgin bulls or bulls that have passed a Trich test should protect your herd from this disease. In addition to Trich, ask the seller if he has had problems with Johne's, vibriosis or BVD. If he is unwilling to provide this information, it could be a red flag. Even on a bull with a clean bill of health, quarantine him from the rest of the herd for at least 30 days after arrival to allow him to clear any infections he might currently be carrying.

Once you've finally found a sound, fertile bull that fits your herd goals with a clean bill of health for

the right price, usually the bull seller will ask if you want insurance on the bull right as you are making out the check. Before simply saying "Yes" and adding \$100 to the total, take the time to learn what the insurance covers and what it doesn't cover. Many policies only cover the death of the animal and not his use, so if he ends up breaking his penis, the insurance will not cover him. I would still recommend buying the insurance if this is the case, but know what you're buying so you don't end up with an unpleasant surprise.

Although this list of tips might seem impossibly long, there are many bulls for sale that fit these criteria. Talk with the bull sellers directly and you'll find that most strive for their bulls to meet these expectations. By not compromising when looking for a bull, you'll be happy with your investment in the fall when the calves go to sale.

Jake Geis, DVM, operated the Tyndall Veterinary Clinic.