

August 16, 2016
 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 David Dugan
 OSU Extension Educator, Agriculture and Natural Resources
 Adams/Brown/Highland Counties
 Ohio Valley Extension Education Research Area

Calving Season, What is a Calving Season?

As cattle producers are now looking in the rearview mirror at the best market in history, it is time to readjust. In the past 3 years marketing pretty much took care of itself for the most part. However, even during the record prices, some producers left money on the table.

As the adjustment time continues, producers need to sharpen their pencils and capture the best prices. Some of the things that might be worth reminding feeder calf producers to do includes: castrating all male calves well before market age; dehorning (I prefer to do this 9 months before the calves are born by using a polled bull); weaning calves prior to market (this would include required shots that your veterinarian or sale barn manager will know); and selling in groups instead of individuals.

If you plan to market calves in groups to gain an advantage on sale day, you probably need at least 6 calves that group up enough to sell together. The bigger the number the better, but if you have a small herd you are limited, so take advantage of what you can. Talk to your sale barn manager about this, as well as communication with the sale barn on when you plan to deliver your calves to market. This communication can be very important.

The groups may take the most effort. You need to plan this out well ahead of sale day, too. In fact you probably need to plan this out at least a year and a half, maybe 2 years before sale day. If you currently leave the bull in with the cows year round, and have a small number of cows, this will be difficult. If you can remove the bull and have a 2 month calving season, or even two 2 month calving seasons, you may be able to group the calves. In addition to marketing the calves, you can vaccinate the entire herd at the same time, as well as all of the other chores. Feeding of the cows can be more efficient if they are all either dry and in late gestation, or all with calves at their side. Otherwise you are most likely over feeding some and under feeding others.

The following is some information from Dr. Les Anderson about converting from year round calving to a tighter calving season. Dr. Anderson is a Beef Specialist at the University of Kentucky.

Maintaining a controlled breeding and calving season can be one of the most important management tools for cow-calf producers. A uniform, heavier, and more valuable calf crop is one key reason for keeping the breeding season short. Plus, more efficient cow supplementation and cow herd health programs are products of a short breeding season. However, converting from a year-long breeding season to a shortened 2 to 3 month breeding season should not be done haphazardly.

A system for converting from year-round to a 75-day controlled calving season over a period of two years would present less loss and fewer problems than to try to convert in one year.



The following steps are suggested for getting on a controlled breeding system:

1. Determine the ideal time of year and the length of your new calving season. For example, my cows will calve from February 15th to April 30th (74 days).
2. Determine the reproductive status of each cow in your herd. First, go to your record book to determine the last date each cow calved. If you don't keep records, try to match the cows and calves up and estimate their age. For example, let's assume we have 30 cows. Calving dates from fall 08 to spring 09 are as follows: Last Aug 08 = 0 cows calved, Sept = 2 calved, Oct = 2 calved, Nov = 1 calved, Dec = 0 calved, Jan = 0 calved, Feb = 3 calved, Mar = 9 calved, Apr = 5 calved, May = 5 calved, June = 2 calved, July = 1 just calved . Keep in mind that the 5 cows that calved in the fall are likely pregnant.
3. Based upon the reproductive status of your herd, determine if you would like one, controlled calving season or two. In our example, 5 cows calving in the fall are likely not worth the hassle so they will be held over and should not be exposed to a bull until next spring. If, however, half of your herd calved July-December, it is a better economic decision to make these your fall-calving cows and the ones that calve from January-June your spring-calving cows.
4. Build a good strong bull pen or well -fenced bull pasture. An electric fence in addition to the regular fence may be needed.
5. Remove your bull(s) from the herd. Select the removal date to coincide with about a 120 day season for your spring-calving cows. In our example, we would remove the bull(s) near the end of August. He would stay in the bull pen until May 7th of next year.
6. Sixty days after removing the bulls from the herd (or at a convenient time near this date), pregnancy check all cows and cull all non-pregnant dry, breeding-age females that have been running with the bull and all non-pregnant cows with calves 5 months of age or older. Your fall-calving cows have likely either calved or are very close to calving.
7. You may want to consider starting the breeding season of your replacement heifers 20 to 30 days ahead of the final breeding date for your herd. Most extended calving seasons are the result of failure of young cows to rebreed in a timely fashion. The additional 20-30 days enhances the opportunity for these young cows to rebreed next season. So, your replacement heifer breeding season would start around April 10th and these females would begin calving around January 20th. I realize that this is a bit early for calving and you might experience 1-2% higher calf death loss. Financially, 1-2% death loss is easier to swallow than a 25% decrease in pregnancy rate the following year.
8. The second year, follow the same system as outlined about except remove the bull on the week of July 20th. If you have fall and spring calvers, then put the bull in for the fall cows around November 20th and remove him around January 20th.

Dates to Remember

Aug. 26	Beef and Forage Field Night at Jackson Research Farm
Sept. 3 -10	Highland County Fair
Sept. 20-22	Farm Science Review
Sept. 26 – Oct. 1	Brown Co. Fair