

LOW COST COW/CALF PROGRAM

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Menopausal Cows?

I don't think so but who knows. It has become such common practice to cull any cow that has birthed 5 or 6 calves. That makes her about 7 or 8 years of age when she is expected to decline rapidly in reproductive and productive capabilities. *Accountants explain that she is fully depreciated, so why keep her?* There are other reasons for culling the older cow, especially in commercial herds. Birth weight of her calves gets lighter after her prime and she doesn't milk like she once did; so weaning weight is less. Culling the older cow is not true for all herds. Kit Pharo¹ is one who takes pride in the number of aged/still producing in his herd (years of drought have resulted in lowering the average age of his herd). Kit is in the seed stock business and the characteristics, including longevity, of his brood herd are extremely important. He takes pride in the fact that, after years of selection, he has an ever-increasing number of cows that poop out their 11th and 12th calf, having never missed a season. As long as she calves, rebreeds and weans a healthy critter, she stays with the herd. And that is without pampering - no hearing aids, spectacles, a morning Aleve and no supplemental energy beyond what she can scrounge from pasture. As his heifers are not babied, his old cows are not coddled. What Kit eventually does with the calves from these older cows, I can only guess. The heifers, at least, probably are first in line for herd replacements. The bull calves most likely are treasured by buyers at his annual bull sales.

University Studies

Most of the reports, addressing the effects of age on beef cow performance, fall into two categories. One is based upon records submitted (to the statistician) by individual ranchers or representatives of breed associations. After the data is massaged, an economist will examine it and then participate in recommendations contained in the final report. Conclusions generally relate to the optimal age at which the older cows

should be culled from the herd. Recommendations are made on the basis of the amount (of monies) brought by the culled critter. If she still is viably producing, then it becomes - one man's trash is another man's treasure. The second suggestion is that she be sold while she still has the ability to deposit flesh and return the top hamburger price. A second class of studies, generally involving university herds, compares the performance of primiparous (one calf) cows with multiparous (more than one calf) cows. The multiparous cows are made up of the whole herd, excluding the first-calf cows. Measurements include postpartum interval, birth weight and of course, weaning weight. Researchers² at the University of California, Davis recently reported on work that examined the herd in detail. They evaluated the effects of age on pregnancy rate, calving interval, birth weight, weaning weight and BCS, within a multiparous cowherd. The 5-yr study was conducted on California foothills' annual grassland at the Sierra Foothill Research and Extension Center near Marysville. The foothills' annuals are green in January but lack quantity until February. The pastures are lush through May and then become toast by the middle of June. Typical production practices in California, and followed by the university, are to calve in October, breed in January and wean in May. *The Californians, with whom we have worked and still do, are calving off lush forage in April.* The study was initiated with 260 multiparous cows of British breed types (119, 67, 15, 18, 12, 9 and 8 cows of age 3 to 10 yr, respectively). Cows were culled when they failed to rebreed, wean a calf at 10 yr of age or transferred to another study. Replacements entered the herd after first calving (2 yr). Forty-five, 54, 27 and 68 animals were added in yr 2 through 5, respectively.

Does Granny Still Swing

The cows were weighed and condition-scored at calving (Oct/Nov), breeding, weaning and during the second trimester (Aug). The data are summarized in the

² Renquist, BJ, JW Oltjen, RD Sainz and CC Calvert. 2006. Effects of age on body condition and production parameters of multiparous beef cows. J. Anim. Sci. 84:1890.

Age	Calv	Breed	Wean	Aug
BW, lbs				
3	1023	860	1087	1063
4	1102	930	1151	1107
5	1175	983	1190	1168
6	1202	1021	1217	1190
7	1213	1016	1217	1199
8	1237	1043	1204	1230
9	1228	1021	1215	1204
10	1190	999	1224	1179
BCS				
3	4.7	3.7	5.3	5.7
4	4.9	3.8	5.5	5.6
5	5.2	4.0	5.6	5.8
6	5.4	4.1	5.6	5.8
7	5.5	4.1	5.7	5.8
8	5.7	4.4	5.6	6.0
9	5.7	4.1	5.6	5.9
10	5.3	3.7	5.6	5.8

table above. Body weights were on a live-weight basis so varied with fill, relative to weighing sequence. BCS is probably more indicative of what actually occurred. The loss of condition (from the second trimester to calving) suggests tissue loss. This is not a good indicator of successful rebreeding after calving. Pregnancy rate, for all age groups, is shown in the following table. Pregnancy rate was not real swell for

Age	Preg Rate
3	0.80
4	0.79
5	0.86
6	0.87
7	0.82
8	0.83
9	0.78
10	0.57

all groups but totally fell out of bed for the 10-yr old cows. Concurrent with this was the dramatic decline in BCS, from the time of calving to time of breeding in the 10-yr old group. I can't help but wonder what the results

would have been had the cows been conditioned on lush, green forage prior to calving. Under the conditions of this study, you've got to cull after 9 yr of age.

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