Building the Cow Herd Through Emphasis on Heifer Management

The Situation
Herd productivity is almost totally dependent on the effectiveness of the replacement heifer management program. The age at which cows are culled determines lifetime profitability. The greater the age at culling the greater the potential for profitability. A 1983 TBP survey of 41 herds in District II indicated that spring calving seasons averaged 104 days and showed a 10.5% death loss in pre-weaned calves. Only 60% of operators were preg-testing cows and replacement heifers. Heifers exposed for breeding equaled only 19% of the number of cows exposed. Data from the 1985 TBP pocket records further indicate that 12% of yearlings and 10.5% of 2 and 3 year old cows are open while only 5% of mature cows were open. This information indicates a key component to improve beef cattle profitability and competitiveness is the management of replacement heifers.

Our Response
There were 21 informational programs presented to beef producers in 11 counties. These included the 6 counties in District II, and 5 counties in District III. The Young Cow Symposium was presented in Twin Falls for cattlemen in Idaho and neighboring states in cooperation with the State IRM Committee and other extension young cow development programs across the state. There were approximately 500 producer participants in these meetings with an average of 4 hours of program presented at each meeting. Three record sheet sets (3 ner forms) for body measurement evaluation of replacement heifers, obtaining calving data, and pregnancy test data, were used with 26 cooperating ranches and 15 non-project cooperating ranches. These data were analyzed with appropriate recommendations made to producers. A slide rule for estimating deliverable calf weight from pelvic measurements was developed. All of the record forms and the heifer development slide rule developed through this program were made available to cooperators and veterinarians state wide and have been distributed by request across the nation and to Canada. District II faculty and program cooperators contributed seven informational papers to the Young Cow Symposium Proceedings which have been made available to beef producers state wide and to neighboring states. A final report for this project has been published and distributed (Progress Report No. 282).

Achievements
Data from the demonstration projects clearly indicate the value of obtaining pelvic measurements
and reproductive evaluations in the selection and management of replacement heifers in building more efficient cow herds. As a result of this effort, many of the cooperating herds are reporting calving season reductions of 20 to 30 days. State wide data through the IRM herd data collection system indicates that Idaho calving seasons have been shortened by 10 days. The 10 day shorter interval applied state wide represents 20 pounds per calf on 450,000 weaned calves or approximately $10,000,000. Cooperating veterinarians report as much as a 10 fold increase over the four years in clientele requesting assistance in selection of replacement heifers based on pelvic measurement, sexual maturity, soundness, and potential calving ease. County Extension Office inquiries from beef producers regarding all aspects of replacement heifer selection and management have also increased by as much as 10 times.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors
The state IRM committee, 25 cooperating ranchers, 10 local veterinarians, 6 county IRM committees, and 4 allied industry representatives cooperated with county faculty and Extension livestock specialists in completion of the 4 year program.

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