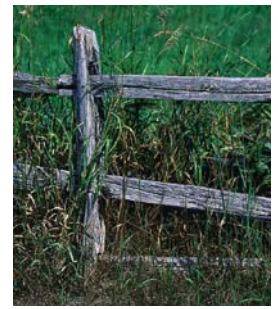


OWYHEE COUNTY CATTLEMEN'S CORNER



MAY, 2011

University of Idaho
Extension

The Importance of Fertility in a Beef Cow Herd

K. Scott Jensen, UI Extension Educator, Owyhee County

In the March issue of the Cattlemen's Corner, I mentioned a book that I had recently read by Laurence Lasater entitled The Lasater Philosophy of Cattle Raising. The book featured ideas and practices of Tom Lasater who developed the Beefmaster breed of cattle. While I am not necessarily a Beefmaster fan, I think some of Mr. Lasater's thoughts and ideas are worth sharing. Such is the case in this article.

How should fertility be defined? It seems to me that for many producers, fertility is defined by the number of cows who conceive and/or get pregnant. This might work except for the fact that most of you are not selling pregnant cows and that some pregnant cows do not wean calves. What do you do with those cows that do not wean calves? Seems to me there are two options; cull them or make excuses for them. Every cow in the herd should wean a good calf every year, beginning as a first-calf heifer.

Consider the following dialogue... comical but often true:

Question: What percentage calf crop do you get?

Answer: Over 95%.

Question: How long does it take you to get a 95% calf crop?

Answer: About eighteen months.

According to Mr. Lasater, "selection for reproductive efficiency consists of a short breeding season (65 days or less) and a calf from every cow every year... regardless". Pregnancy testing is also a must with open cows being sold. Fall calving herds should not be made up of open or late bred cows that were held over because they were too good to get rid of. In most instances, cows that are held over will show up again as open cows within a year or two.

Drastic step? I don't really think so. This type of management attitude and practice will rapidly and effectively eliminate infertile females from the herd. In similar fashion, if cows who experience calving difficulty or are poor mothers are sold, these problems can be significantly reduced.

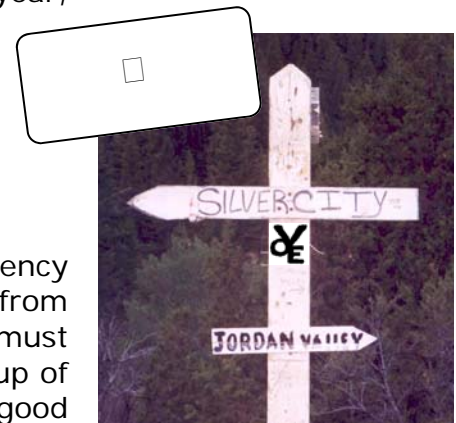
Mr. Lasater states that "anybody can accomplish the foregoing if they have the nerve to stay with the program. The theory is simple, but the practice is not. However, once this program is adopted, management becomes the key consideration in fertility".

With that being said, consider management options that might

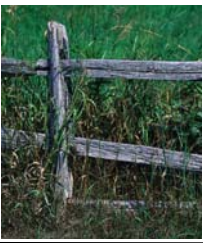
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This newsletter is provided as a public service to producers and others in beef industry related fields. If you do not have an interest in receiving the Cattlemen's Corner Beef Newsletter in the future, please contact the Extension Office and we will remove your name from our mailing list. Likewise, if you know of someone who would like to receive the newsletter, please let us know.
<http://extension.uidaho.edu/owyhee>
208-896-4104



Watch for Grass Tetany This Spring

Jana Kincheloe, Montana State University, Judith Basin County Agent

The arrival of spring grass combined with cool and rainy weather has created prime conditions for grass tetany in cattle. Sometimes called grass staggers or hypomagnesemia, grass tetany is a metabolic disorder related to a magnesium (Mg) deficiency. Animals come down with grass tetany most often after grazing rapidly growing, lush cool-season grasses or small grain pastures in spring and fall. Tetany is not common on legume pastures. Grass tetany can also occur when cattle are wintered on low Mg grass or cereal grain hay. The risk should decrease if animals are fed a grass-legume hay.

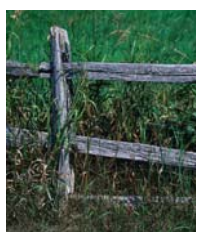
Older cows in early lactation are typically the most susceptible to tetany, compared to younger cows. Younger cows can mobilize Mg reserves from their bones more readily than older cows to help resolve deficiency issues. To prevent grass tetany, animals should be fed a high Mg supplement or free-choice mineral containing 8 to 12 percent Mg. Most magnesium compounds are unpalatable to cattle when offered alone, and need to be added to a protein supplement, grain mix, liquid supplement, or salt. In general, incorporating Mg with salt is very effective since cattle naturally have an appetite for salt, especially when grazing lush grasses. Intake of both salt and magnesium will increase magnesium absorption. Dr. John Paterson, Montana State University Extension Beef Cattle Specialist, recommends feeding two to four ounces of high magnesium mineral supplement per day to prevent tetany. "Since magnesium can be unpalatable, it is important to feed mineral mixed with at least 20% salt for approximately 30 days prior to spring grazing to allow cows to increase consumption to target levels," he says.

Grass that is susceptible to producing grass tetany often is low in magnesium (Mg), calcium (Ca), and sodium (Na), but

higher in potassium (K). Paterson notes that forages with a "tetany ratio" [basically the millequivalents of $K / (Ca + Mg)$] of greater than 2.2 can increase the occurrence of tetany. A forage analysis can be run on forages to determine the tetany ratio. "I recommend that ranchers make sure their mineral supplement also has at least 12% calcium to reduce the risk of tetany even further," he says.

In severe cases of grass tetany, symptoms are not evident and the animal typically dies. In some mild cases, symptoms include decreased milk yield, nervousness, and staggering. They may also lie down and get up frequently. Cattle are easily excited at this point and may respond to stimulus by continuously bellowing or running. They will have a staggered gait pattern, followed by collapse, stiffening of muscles, and convulsions. Animals usually die during or after a convulsion unless treatment is given. Treatment of cows in the early stages of grass tetany can be effective, but animals should be handled quietly and gently to create the least amount of stress and exertion possible. Any stress that causes excitement such as driving or roping can result in sudden death. A sterile solution of magnesium sulfate given subcutaneously is a common treatment. Producers should contact their veterinarian to discuss other treatment options.





The Importance of Fertility in a Beef Cow Herd . . . continued from page 1

affect fertility and also profitability. What time of year are you calving and attempting to get your cowherd bred back? The most critical time in a cow's life is the period of time between calving and breeding. Whatever time of year your herd calves in, are your calves hitting the ground in decent weather conditions? Is there adequate feed available for the cow to cycle and breed back (and I am not talking about the size of the haystack)? Are there other factors such as summer heat, excessive mud, etc. that might make breed-back difficult?

Again, the purpose of these articles is not to tell any of you that you are doing things wrong! I do, however, hope they will cause you to think about what you are doing, why you are doing it, and how you can become more profitable and sustainable in your business.

"Selection for reproductive efficiency consists of a short breeding season (65 days or less) and a calf from every cow every year...regardless. Anybody can accomplish the foregoing if they have the nerve to stay with the program. The theory is simple, but the practice is not. However, once this program is adopted, management becomes the key consideration in fertility."

— Laurence Lasater
"The Lasater Philosophy of Cattle Raising"



Past editions of the *Cattlemen's Corner Beef Newsletter* are available on our webpage at <http://extension.uidaho.edu/owyhee>



Owyhee County Youth Update

Forty-three steers were weighed in March 5. Of those, nine are sponsored by members of OCA

Seven youth are currently participating in the OCA Beef Heifer Replacement Program which began last year. Applications for this

year are being taken by any OCA board member or at the Extension Office until June 1. Applications are available on our website and at the Extension Office. If you are interested in donating a heifer to the program, please contact Mark Frisbie, OCA President, at 890-4517 or talk with any OCA board member.

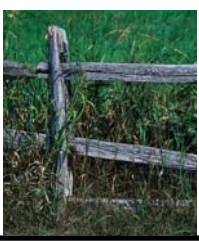
Two hundred and two swine were weighed in on April 25.

Weigh in for sheep and meat goats will be held on Friday, May 27, 7:00-9:00 am at the fairgrounds in Homedale; 11:00 am at Jordan Valley High School; and 4:00-5:00 pm at Rimrock High School.

We hope to see you at the Fair, August 8-13, and at the Owyhee County Junior Livestock Sale at noon on August 13. We thank you for your continued support of our youth!



The
Owyhee
Cattlemen's
Association
annual meeting
will be held
**Saturday,
July 30,**
in Silver City.
Watch the web-
page and the
next newsletter
for more
information!



Cow Camp Chatter: Taking Care of Business

Ron Torell, Long-Standing Educator and Advocate of Agriculture

Is it any wonder that those individuals who are highly motivated and self-disciplined with good time management and organizational skills are usually the most productive and successful in their chosen field? These people have the heart and passion for what they do. They are usually self-starters who know how to prioritize and multi-task in order to get the job done. These are the people we search out to do business with. They can be counted on in every situation. They are dependable and good to their word. In every walk of life there are those who have a natural sense for taking care of business and those who don't. Although many of these traits may not come naturally to some folks, the good news is that they can be developed and fine tuned over time.



Those of us in the beef business know only too well how easy it is to fall behind the eight ball at some point or another in the course of a year. After a long, drawn out winter, spring hits us full force starting with calving. From there on out there's branding, breeding, turning out, fertilizing, irrigating, haying, moving cattle, marketing, weaning, shipping and so on. In between we have to find time to fix fence, repair breakdowns, make management decisions and at the same time take care of the everyday necessities of life. If we let things slide they continue to add up until we are overwhelmed. We can't do it all so unfortunately all of it doesn't get done. And what does get done may not get done well because we are just too strapped for time to do a good job. This is where advanced planning comes in to play. By setting realistic goals based on our priorities we are able to enter the busy times with more efficiency and less worries while still giving it our best.



Organization and time management go hand-in-hand. The best place to start is by making a list of both your non-monetary short and long-term goals. Prioritize the items on your list in order to get the most demanding and tedious jobs done first. Post your lists in a conspicuous spot so you are reminded every day of your commitment to your goals and priorities. Check them off as you complete them. You will feel a real sense of accomplishment when you are able to see the jobs checked off. Update your list periodically. If you see something that needs to be done but you can't get to it right away, add it to the list. This written commitment will help keep you on track and encourage you to follow through with your plan. You will have to be ambitious and self-disciplined to make this work. Think ahead. Don't wait until shipping day to fix the loading chute. Put it on the priority list and fix it early. Take the time to make it a permanent fix to the problem.



Have you ever noticed how procrastination can cost you in the long run both in time and money? Organizing the ranch shop for the first time in twenty years is a case in point. Imagine the time you'll save when your tools are arranged so that you can find the right one just when you need it. Chances are with an organized shop you'll be more apt to follow through with a lot of the jobs you would have normally put off just because you weren't able to find what you needed to get the job done. During the long winter months go out and tackle that bin of bolts you've been meaning to sort forever. You'll have saved both time and money spent in making a trip to town to buy what you already have on hand.



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Who Should Attend:

- Producers of beef and dairy cattle, sheep, horses, and other domesticated grazing animals
- Professionals working in livestock-related industries

How You Can Benefit:

- Enhance your grazing-management skills and improve your forage and livestock production
- Reduce the dollars and hours you spend fertilizing, harvesting, and feeding hay
- Increase your animal units and net income
- Improve deteriorating pastures
- Gain a foundation of knowledge from which to launch a new livestock operation
- Learn sustainable practices that will maintain and improve the productivity of your ranch

Learn How to:

- Design grazing cells and determine appropriate stocking rates
- Design water systems
- Design and build permanent and portable electric fences for use under center-pivots and wheel lines
- Minimize animal stress during handling
- Stockpile standing forage and draw on animals' "fat banks" to reduce winter feed costs
- Devise custom-grazing leases
- Develop a ranch economic plan



Intensive Management of Irrigated Pastures

LOST RIVERS GRAZING ACADEMY

June 14-17, 2011

Salmon, Idaho



A boots-on-the-ground workshop for livestock operators who want to increase their forage production, stocking rates, animal performance, and net income by letting their livestock harvest the sun's energy through their feed.

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Registration Form:

Class size is limited. Pre-register by June 9, by sending a \$100 deposit (made out to *Owyhee County Extension*) to:

Lost Rivers Grazing Academy
UI Owyhee County Extension
P.O. Box 400, Marsing, ID 83639

Your deposit is fully refundable until June 7. The remainder of your fee is due at on-site registration at 8 a.m. the first day of the conference.

Name(s):

Organization:

Mailing Address:

Contact Information:

Home phone: _____

Work phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication or program information or reasonable accommodations need to contact Debbie Titus at least one week in advance at P.O. Box 400, Marsing, ID 83639, 208-896-4104, or owvhee@uidaho.edu.

OWYHEE COUNTY

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Taking Care of Business . . . continued from page 4

It's important to be realistic when setting long term goals. Identify the areas that will add the most to your ranching operation's efficiency when they are restored. As unpleasant as it can be, digging post holes, setting corner posts, making gates and repairing fence has to be done. Approach the job with a different attitude. Imagine the time that could be saved if you could contain your cattle. Then get to work. Set practical goals. Since it took several years for the fences to get in to their current state of disrepair, it's going to take a good period of time to get them back in shape. Work on fixing a quarter to half-a-mile of fence a week during the off-time of the year when more pressing jobs are not overpowering. In just a few months you'll have repaired 5 to 10 miles of fence.



There are always obstacles to overcome while working toward your goals. Life has a way of throwing curve balls every now and then. It helps to remain focused on your objective. Get and stay organized. When you have down time, work on your list of goals. Be motivated to get things done and done right the first time. The best time to start taking care of business and reaping the benefits of a productive and successful life is now. Who knows? You might actually start enjoying the process.

