**Raising Heifers to Breed**

Taking time to prepare heifers for breeding by considering when and how many heifers to breed each year is important to cow/calf producers’ bottom line. In addition to selecting heifers and deciding when to turn out the bulls, proper management of heifers prior to and after breeding is critical to breeding season success also.

Whether you are raising or buying replacement heifers, the goal is to start breeding heifers near 12 – 14 months of age. By this time, heifers should have reached or be close to reaching puberty. Heifers must be pubertal to become bred.

Whether using natural service or artificial insemination, take time to monitor both heifers and bulls to make sure heifers are being serviced when they are showing estrus and the bull is successful in servicing them. It’s good practice to have a Breeding Soundness Exam on bulls prior to turning in with heifers. If heifers are not showing estrus, nutrition and body condition should be accessed. On the other hand, if bulls are not able to cover heifers in heat, consider adding another bull or replacing the current bull with a more aggressive breeder.

Another way to determine how many heifers to keep is based on bull power. Recommended bull to heifer ratio during the breeding season will vary based on maturity, and scrotal circumference of bulls, but the minimum recommendation for natural service breeding is 1 yearling bull for every 20 heifers.

Annual replacement rates on cow/calf operations in most programs is 15%. This will vary based on operation, but a rule of thumb is to keep 5 – 10 % more replacement heifers than you need. Why? Not all heifers will breed during the breeding season for multiple reasons including failure to reach puberty, nutrition and environment interactions or loss of pregnancy. Therefore, keeping more heifers than you need allows you to keep only the most fertile heifers that get bred early in the season and maintain the pregnancy, while those heifers that breed later or not at all can be eliminated from the herd.

The Weight and Growth curve of your heifers is important as well this chart gives you an idea of where you want the heifers to be, come breeding time. Here are just a few examples to go by.

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| **Breed** | **Growth Curve**  **Early to Late Puberty** | **Age and Avg. Weight** |
| **English Cattle**  Hereford, Angus,  Red Angus, Shorthorn | Early to Mid- Puberty | 12-14 months  700-950lbs |
| **Continental Cattle**  Main, Charolais, Limousin  Simmental, | Mid to Late- Puberty | 12-14 months  800-1000lbs |
| **American Breeds**  Brahman, Brangus,  Tiger stripes, Superbaldy’s | Later Puberty | 14-16 months  800-1000lbs |
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