

Shortening Your Calving Season

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There are many management practices that can be implemented to improve profits. Shortening your calving season may be one of the most cost effective decisions you can make. A recent survey performed by University of Georgia scientist, Drs. Johnny Rossi, Mel Pence and Curt Lacy (2001) reports that 65% of producers surveyed utilize a controlled breeding season and that 36% of these producers are on a 60 – 90 day breeding season. These figures seem positive compared to past surveys but ultimately with 35% of producers on a year-round breeding season and 64% breeding longer than 90 days, improved profits can be easily obtained by simply controlling the breeding season in a defined 90-day window.

Calves born in a defined time frame will have increased weaning weight averages compared to calves that are born in an expanded or year-round breeding season. For example, if all calves are weaned on a specific date, it is easy to see that calves born in the beginning of the breeding season will weigh more than calves born later in the breeding season. By defining the breeding season so as to allow for optimum time for the calves to grow, the weaning weight average will improve for the entire herd.

Producers who are not utilizing a defined breeding season often raise the question "How do I achieve this goal?" Obviously if you are on a year-round breeding season you do not want to exclude quality females that have been consistently fertile throughout their lifetimes. Determining the time of year you want to calf will ultimately determine which females will need to be adjusted. Splitting the herd into two calving seasons may be an option for some producers. This will allow for most females to fall into one of the two breeding seasons, and for the producer to take advantage of the market at different times in the year. Considerations must be made for the amount of time, labor and facilities necessary to maintain both herds appropriately.

Shortening the breeding season into a 90-day window can be achieved by utilizing defined guidelines associated with when to put a bull into and out of a herd. Table 1 demonstrates how a herd can be adjusted to achieve a 90-day breeding season. The first step is deciding when the last calf of the breeding season should be born and determining when the last day a bull is to remain in the herd. The example in Table 1 explains how to develop a spring calving season.

In the first year of changes, bulls are removed from the herd on June 20th and all females are pregnancy checked on August 20th. Bulls are then placed back with the herd on December 22nd for a six-month period; this is the only variable that

will change throughout the three years. Replacement heifers should be exposed to the bulls beginning on February 20th to align these females with their intended breeding dates as matured cows. Bulls should be removed from the replacement females on May 1st.

In the second year, the beginning breeding date changes from December 20th to February 1st. This change tightens the breeding season from 6 months to approximately 5 months.

The third year finalizes the intended breeding season as bulls are exposed to the mature cowherd on March 22nd. This change will tighten the breeding season to approximately 3 months or 90 days.

Utilizing this example can be useful to many producers on a year-round calving season. It will eliminate cattle that fail to conceive early in the breeding season but will result in overall increased reproductive efficiency. If you have any questions regarding this topic, please feel free to contact your local County Agent, Veterinarian or contact me at (912) 681-5639.

Table 1. Three-Year Plan for Converting from Year-Round to 90-Day Calving Season of January, February and March

First Year										
Remove bull June 20	Pregnancy Check Aug. 20					Put bull with herd Dec. 22	Breed Replacements Feb. 20	Remove bulls from Replacements May 1		
June ↑ J	A	↑ S	O	N	D	↑ J	F	↑ M	A	↑ M
Second Year										
Remove bull June 20	Pregnancy Check Aug. 20					Put bull with herd Feb. 1 Breed Replacements Feb. 20		Remove bulls from Replacements May 1		
June ↑ J	A	↑ S	O	N	D	J	↑ F	↑ M	A	↑ M
Third Year										
Remove bull June 20	Pregnancy Check Aug. 20					Put bull with herd Mar. 22 Breed Replacements Feb. 20		Remove bulls from Replacements May 1		
June ↑ J	A	↑ S	O	N	D	J	F	↑ M	↑ A	↑ M

Source: C.M. Triplett, Southern Regional Beef Cow-Calf handbook. SR1005