



Western Beef Development Centre

Ever Thought of Re-Breeding Your Open Cows?

Introduction

Every fall at pregnancy checking producers wonder what to do with their open cows. Questions that arise include: Should I

1. sell these cows into the depressed fall cull market?
2. fatten these cows for a while and then market them?
3. re-expose these cows to a bull and try to get some of them in calf?

This article describes what the WBDC chose to do after discovering 12.7% of its cows were open at pregnancy checking in the fall of 2002.

October – 1st Pregnancy Checking

On October 19th 2002 the WBDC pregnancy checked its cowherd and found 37 of 291 exposed cows (12.7%) were not bred. The cows had been exposed to bulls for a 47-day breeding period (June 28th - August 15th). Questions then arose as to why this happened and what should be done with these cows given 2/3 of them had only produced 2 calves. The group of open cows was estimated to be worth approximately \$600/head if they were to be sold into the fall cull market (see equation following).

Estimated Shrunken Weight of Cows	1206 lbs/head
X	
Estimated Market Value	\$0.52/lb
Less Marketing/Trucking Deductions	\$30/head
Market Value October 19/2002	= \$597.12/head

Why Did the Cows Come Up Open?

First off it was decided that there must be a justification as to why these cows should be re-bred. Therefore it was necessary to consider possible ideas as to why the cows came up open. It was concluded the most likely reason the cows came up open was due to:

1. Less than adequate nutrition prior to breeding (due to drought), meaning loss of body condition score after calving (3.25 on March 13th to 2.7 on June 12th - scale 1 to 5)
2. High bull to cow ratios (42 cows: 1 bull).
However, sires were rotated throughout the herd during the breeding period, and
3. A 47-day breeding period

Thus it was felt a number of the cows that did come up open would likely re-breed. However, before turning the bulls out with the open cows, a budget was put together that included predictions on conception rates and the costs of keeping these cows at home for an extended period of time.

Cows Re-Exposed to Bulls

These 37 open cows were turned out with two bulls for a 31-day breeding period (October 22nd to November 22nd 2002). The cows were pregnancy checked 60 days after the bulls were removed and it was found 29 of the 37 cows (78.37%) had been re-bred. These 29 August-September calving cows were then advertised and sold for an average price of \$1186/head in late March. Table 1 provides the costs and returns associated with re-breeding these cows, feeding them for an extended period of time, re-pregnancy checking, advertising, etc.

Conclusion

We expect this high pregnancy rate may not be achieved every year given the abundant re-growth for grazing and rather mild weather during this particular breeding period. The bottom line of Table 1 is that exposing these open cows to a bull for 31 days returned us approximately \$214/head more than if we had sold these cows into the cull market in late October. Re-breeding open cows and selling them for more money than cull price works well when there is a demand for breeding stock. However, when calf prices become depressed marketing August-September calving cows in late March becomes much less profitable, given at that point late calving cows typically trade at values very similar to open cows.

Table 1. Economics of Re - Breeding Open Cows			
	# of Head	\$/Head	Total \$
Revenues Net of Marketing/Trucking Deductions			
Value of Bred Cows Sold	29	1186	34394
Value of Open Cows Sold	8	698.4	5587.2
Total Revenue Net of Marketing Deductions	37	1080.573	39981.2
Expenses			
Value of Cows When Turned out with Bulls October 22 nd	37	597.12	22093.44
Supervised Grazing (37 Cows - 99 Days, 2 Bulls - 31 Days)		75.52	2794.25
Winter Feed & Bedding (2120 Feeding Days)		80.78	2988.79
Breeding Costs (\$35/cow)		35	1295
Advertising in Western Producer		2.54	94
Veterinarian Services for 2 nd Pregnancy Check		4	148
Interest on Value of Cows and Feed (6%)		17.03	630
Yardage During Feeding Period (\$1/Day)		54.21	2006
Total Expenses		844	32049.48
Return	37	214.37	7931.72