



DIRECTOR'S NOTE— ROD VERGOUWEN

Howdy folks;

Changes and challenges have always been a part of agriculture. It is great to see that the Western Canada Conference on Soil Health & Grazing sold out early. This shows the need and desire for producers, consumers and government to educate themselves about soil, plant, animal health and the regenerative impact agriculture can have on the environment.

Some challenges we face are out of our control (such as weather and markets), but we can make changes to our operation that affect the impact. Calving dates, grazing plans, crop rotations, and feeding strategies can be changed to address issues we can't control.

At home are working on changing crop rotations and have incorporated cover crops to address soil and plant health concerns including; moisture (too much or too little), disease, and the efficient use of our growing days. This year we used a cocktail mix seeded with oats to improve feed quality and saw very good results. The September and October snowfall made baling green feed interesting but had little effect on swath grazing quality.

Beth found an unexpected market for the flowers in the cocktail mix to a wholesaler supplying fresh flowers for weddings, grad, etc. The economic margins for fresh flowers is way better so it will interesting to see what color of flower will be found in the oats next year.

Rod Vergouwen

Cover crop found at Vergouwen Farm with Oats and Phacelia



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Feedlots to be put to the test—and that's what they want



Thwarting resistance and reassuring consumers behind antimicrobial monitoring.

A new pilot project will give Canada's cattle industry some long-overdue and much-needed data about antimicrobial use and resistance on Canadian beef farms.

"Antibiotic resistance is a really, really big deal, both for human and animal health," said Reynold Bergen, science director for the Beef Cattle Research Council.

"If bugs get resistant to antibiotics, the antibiotics won't work anymore, and then we've got big problems.

"Ultimately, for producers, we need these tools to continue to be effective so that we can maintain animal health and welfare."

But it's not just farmers who are worried about antibiotic resistance in their animals, said Bergen. Increasingly, retailers are setting targets for antibiotic use in the meat they sell or shifting to antibiotic-free meat altogether.

This trend, driven largely by consumer demand, has already influenced government policies around antibiotic use in livestock. Last December, the

federal government increased veterinary oversight on on-farm antibiotic use, requiring a prescription for around 340 antimicrobials that had been previously available over the counter.

The problem with these types of regulatory changes, said Bergen, is that there isn't much science around the actual rates of on-farm antibiotic use and resistance in beef cattle.

That data exists in other livestock sectors, though.

Since the early 2000s, the Canadian Integrated Program for Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance (CIPARS) has been monitoring antibiotic use and resistance in all livestock. But its on-farm component has largely been limited to pigs and broiler chickens, as those were the animals considered at highest risk for antibiotic resistance.

In the last year, its on-farm services have expanded to dairy cattle and turkeys, but because of budget constraints, beef cattle had been put on the back burner, said Bergen.

"But what that means is that, as an industry, we've got no data to back up that we're using antibiotics responsibly on farm," said Bergen.

"So we need facts — partly to defend our production practices and to reassure consumers we're doing things right, but also to identify where we can do better."

On-farm surveillance

And those facts are coming, thanks to additional government, beef industry, and pharmaceutical sector funding.

Over the next three years, CIPARS will be partnering with feedlots and feedlot-focused veterinary practices in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario on a three-year pilot project looking at antibiotic use and resistance in these three major cattle-feeding provinces.

"This is not the first project of this type, but it's one of the most comprehensive because it ties use in with resistance," said Dr. Craig Dorin of Veterinary Agri-Health Services in Air-drie, one of the practices involved in the project.

The first piece of the project will focus on determining which pathogens exist in the feedlot, said Dorin.

"I think we already have a good handle on that, but part of surveillance is looking at the same thing over and over again to see if there have been changes over time."

That ongoing surveillance will also compare resistance in geographic areas relative to how antimicrobials are used in those areas, he added. This will allow the beef industry to monitor trends around antimicrobial use and resistance — particularly for antibiotics that might also have an impact on human health.

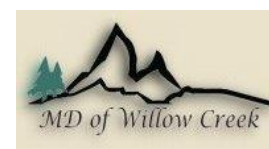
"What this will help us do is identify trends over time — are we seeing an increase in use or an increase in resistance?" said Bergen.

"Either way, knowing helps us see whether we're on the right track or if we need to make some adjustments."

For Dorin, that's the most important piece of this study.

(Continued on page 5)

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Details

February 14th, 2020

Wheatland County Office

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FFGA Member - \$75.00+ GST

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Register at <https://jimgerrishwheatland2020.eventbrite.ca> before February 7, 2020



WHEATLAND COUNTY

Where There's Room to Grow

Itching and rubbing in your herd? Lice treatment may be necessary



The coming of winter means the coming of lice. Now is the time to treat.

Lice infections in cattle are not anything any rancher wants to see; the pests hurt profits. The sad fact is that every herd has some level of infestation. Lice affects cows, stockers and feedlot cattle, hurting their performance from December through March.

Ranch losses because of lice

The USDA has estimated that livestock producers lose up to \$125 million per year due to effects of lice infestations. Not only can they be the cause of direct animal performance losses, but also increases wear and tear on facilities and fences. The direct losses to cattle come in forms of decreased average daily gains (documented 0.25 pounds per day reduction in growing calves), skin infections, and potentially blood loss and anemia.

Two types of cattle lice

There are two different types of lice that infect cattle. Biting lice feed on the skin and secretions on the outside of the animal. The other type is known as sucking lice. These species are blood feeders and pierce the skin.

Both types of lice spend their entire lifecycles on the cattle hosts. Off of cattle they survive very poorly and generally only last a few days. However, they can live up to 10 days off host in the right environment, leading

to reinfection in groups of animals.

It is important to note that lice are host species specific. This means that cattle lice cannot affect people, horses, or any other species.

In general, every herd has some level of lice infestation. Lice are carried from season to season by a small percentage of the

herd that act as reservoir hosts.

Adults lay eggs on the hair of infected animals. Overall lifecycle for an egg to mature into an adult, and lay eggs is roughly 28 days. Most females lay one egg per day.

Lice symptoms

Clinical signs of lice infected cattle generally begin with constant rubbing and scratching within the herd. Fences, posts, water troughs, trees and any other stationary object could be subject to damage from this rubbing. As the infection and irritation continues, large hairless patches will become evident on animals.

Further diagnosing the issue beyond the clinical signs requires seeing the adult lice on the skin. Parting the hair will reveal the lice. They are very small but can still be seen. They are roughly the size of a grain of sand. The economic threshold for treatment is roughly 10 lice per square inch.

Lice treatment

There are several options when it comes to treatment of lice in cow herds. One option is the macrocyclic lactone class of endectocides. Examples of products in this class include ivermectin, doramectin, eprinomectin, and moxidectin.

These products come in pour-on and injectable formulations. Macrocyclic lactones treat internal intestinal nematodes, but also work on external parasites such as lice. It is important to note that the injectable formulations do not work on biting lice since

they do not blood feed.

These products are most often used on a herd basis at the end of summer grazing going into winter. Even with herd treatment in the fall, later season lice infections can still occur. This can be due to fence line contact with other animals, or introduction of new animals.

The other option is topical treatments that are non-systemic. These products are typically pyrethroid products similar to what is commonly used to control horn flies during the summer months.

These products are very effective against the adult lice, but to not affect the larvae or eggs. Retreatment is often indicated 14 days after initial treatment.

There is a product available that is a pyrethroid in combination with an IGR (insect growth regulator) that not only works very well against the adults, but also works against the eggs and larvae. Use of this particular product eliminates the need to retreat in 14 days.

Since these topical formulations kill lice by contact, it is extremely important to apply them appropriately to cattle. Most formulations call for the pour-on to be applied with full coverage on the topline of animals, from poll to the trailhead.

When treating cattle, it is also important to treat the entire group. Missing one animal could serve as the reservoir for reinvesting the entire herd.

The same thought should be given to new additions to the herd from an outside source. Basic biosecurity such as treating and segregating new additions for 30 days is not only good to reduce risk of lice, it is also a great tool in decreasing introduction of other diseases.

Author: A.J Tarpoff; Extension veterinarian with Kansas State University. Article can be found at <https://www.beefmagazine.com/animal-health/itching-and-rubbing-your-herd-lice-treatment-may-be-necessary>

(Continued from page 2)

“We are producing food, and the people who consume the beef that we produce need to have a high level of confidence that the products we use on these animals are used prudently and appropriately,” he said.

“Part of prudent use is selecting the right antimicrobial for the right situation — using not only an antimicrobial that will be effective against the disease you’re trying to prevent, but one that will also have minimal impact on the potential resistance that might be transferred into the human population.”

But this study will also give retailers a baseline to create science-based targets for antibiotic use in the meat they sell.

“Some retailers are going antibiotic free and others are wanting to set targets to reduce antibiotic use,” said Bergen. “And with data like this, they’ll have a sense of where they can make a meaningful difference.”

Rapid diagnostics

That will be particularly important for respiratory pathogens such as bovine respiratory disease, Bergen added.

“That’s why a lot of these antibiotics are being used — to manage respiratory disease,” he said. “So if you can get a sense of why they’re being used for respiratory disease and what degree of resistance is there, you’re tying it much more closely to management decisions than you would with any other retail meat.”

But it will be tricky for a study like this to actually drive on-farm management decisions in the short term, Dorin cautioned.

“That’s going to be a part of it — to make sure that the antibiotics that we’re using are still the correct choices — but it’s not going to drive day-to-day decisions,” he said.

“Day-to-day decisions happen very quickly, and this is a study where we’ll be looking at annual results. We’ll be able to look at year-to-year changes, but we won’t be able to get down to the level of week-to-week change at a particular farm.”

But that technology is coming.

Another study, set to start in the next year, will explore rapid genetic testing for respiratory pathogens.

Right now, the turnaround time for samples sent to the lab can be anywhere from a few days to up to a week — and a lot can change in a week, said Bergen.

“Those results tell you what you should have done a week ago if you had known at the time,” he said. “But between a week ago and today, that animal could have got way sicker, and it could be way different bugs that are causing the problem now, and they could have a different antibiotic-resistance profile.”

But as genetic testing technologies improve, rapid diagnostics could change that, Dorin said.

“This new genetic testing would allow results to be back within hours instead of days,” he said.

“Our hope is, over time, those hours will turn into minutes, and then when a sick animal comes in, we can test it and know exactly what antibiotics should be used on that animal on that day.”

That will go a long way toward maintaining the antibiotics available to cattle producers.

“We have a limited number of products available for use in the beef industry,” said Dorin.

“It’s expensive to bring these products to market, and it gets more expensive as time goes on. We’re worried that resistance may be developing faster than our ability to produce new products, so reducing our antimicrobial use in favour of other management practices — like low-stress weaning — is important.”

Bergen agrees.

“Antibiotics have been so effective for so long that they’ve become a valuable tool, but because they’ve been so effective, there’s been a little less need to find alternatives,” he said.

“There’s a chance — and not a remote chance — that 50 years from now, the antibiotics we’ll have available to treat animal diseases might be the same ones we have now.

“So we’d better use the ones we have now responsibly so that they

keep working down the line.”

Author: Jennifer Blair, report with Alberta Farmer Express. Original article found at <https://www.albertafarmexpress.ca/2019/11/06/feedlots-to-be-put-to-the-test-and-thats-what-they-want-2/?module=under-carousel&pgtype=section&i=>

Canadian Agricultural Partnership

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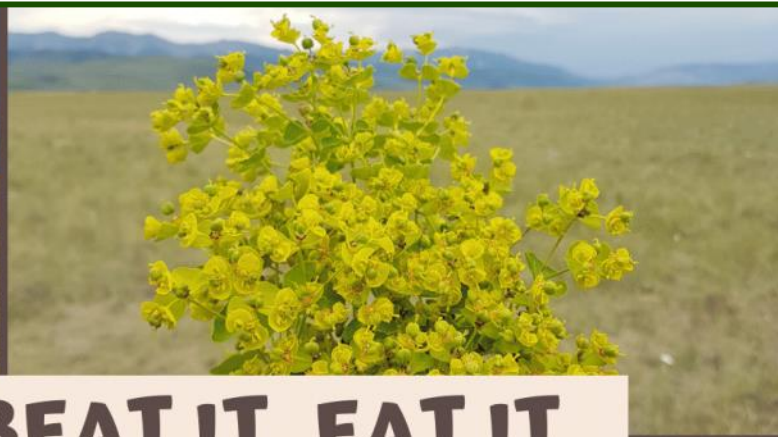
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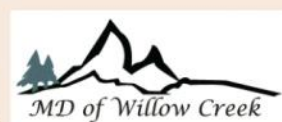
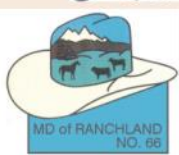
- Grazing Sheep & Goats and Use of Guardian Dogs on Public & Private Land
- Conditioning Cattle to Eat Weeds
- Grazing Practices/Shepherding (Sheep & Goats)
- Introduction to Livestock Guardian Dogs

WORKSHOP DETAILS

Thursday January 9th, 2020
Fort Macleod Community Hall
8:30am to 4:00pm
Lunch is included in registration

REGISTRATION

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Researchers make case for grassland benefits



Carbon sequestration, soil health, water quality and pollinator habitat could be used to justify paying producers.

A stronger case for maintaining Canada's shrinking grasslands is being made by researchers.

"Our long-term goal is to recognize and quantify the magnitude the ecosystem goods and services these grasslands supply," said Ed Bork of the University of Alberta and Mattheis Chair in Rangeland.

An army of scientists is working on the benefits beef production lends to carbon sequestration, soil health, water quality and pollinator habitat on Canada's grasslands.

"We are trying to make the argument that grassland managers and cattle producers should be paid for some of the lesser known environmental goods and services other than forage production or beef production," he said.

Researcher Denis Angers of **Agri-culture Canada** in Quebec focuses on Eastern Canada, where carbon stores

are being rapidly depleted. Before European settlement and land cultivation in North America, soil carbon content was in balance in the forests of the East and prairies in the West, he said at the recent Canadian Forage and Grassland Association conference held in Moncton.

Cultivation caused a loss of 20 to 30 percent of the soil car-

bon.

"In the East, our carbon content is going down in general and that is basically because of cultivation of pasture and hay land," he said.

More corn and soybeans are planted and 2.5 to five million acres of pasture and hay land have been lost in Eastern Canada in the last 50 years.

When perennial forages go back into the mix the carbon starts to rebuild.

"If you rotate perennials with annuals, you see an increase in carbon with long-term perennial crops, but it depends what you have in your rotation," he said.

In Prince Edward Island, researchers established tall fescue stands and seven years later saw an improvement of about two tonnes of extra carbon per hectare (0.81 tonnes per acre) per year. Carbon was accumulated at fairly deep levels at about 50 to 60 centimetres.

Perennial forages aggregate the soil with dense root systems and microbial activity increases.

"It only takes two to three years to see a fairly dramatic effect," he said.

Yields also improve, especially when mixtures are used because a diversity of roots develop at various depths.

"There is limited information on the effect of different species on soil organic carbon. We know putting in perennial systems will improve soil carbon but in terms of telling apart different species, we don't know," he said.

Perennials are well-suited to transfer carbon to the soil. They capture more solar energy annually because they start growing early in the spring and grow longer in the fall. They fix more carbon and release more into the soil.

Applying cattle manure on grasslands has a positive effect for soil carbon but grazing benefits are up for debate.

"Grazing is a tough one on the effect on soil carbon. We don't have much data on the effect in a temperate climate," he said.

International literature says decreasing grazing intensity can increase soil organic carbon but most data comes from tropical climates.

Bork's results from research in Canadian plots have been different. He has 100 research plots in Alberta on public land and has also conducted research on former PFRA pastures in Saskatchewan, although most of the work is based in Alberta. He is investigating the effects of grazing and plant species.

In grasslands, the vast majority of the biomass is below ground. The root

(Continued on page 8)

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(Continued from page 7)

systems tend to be much larger than the shoot system above ground. It is the turnover of those roots over time that builds up large amounts of organic matter and carbon.

The vegetation removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere via photosynthesis. The more plant biomass grown, the more carbon is removed from the atmosphere and oxygen is released.

Photosynthesis occurs for about three months on the Prairies and six months in wetter areas.

“We are really removing CO₂ from the atmosphere three to six months of the year. The rest of the time, the ecosystem is sleeping,” Bork said.

Grasslands cover about a quarter of the land base and store up to 30 percent of the world’s soil carbon.

About 300 gigatonnes of carbon are stored in the temperate grasslands of Western Canada, South America and central and northern China.

His research team worked on 100 sites across Alberta and Saskatchewan to see how much carbon they store based on tonnes per hectare.

“Even our most arid environment of dry mixed grass of southeastern Alberta around Medicine Hat store roughly seven tonnes per hectare of carbon. That is not a full accounting because we are not looking even deeper below 30 cm,” he said.

The wettest grasslands of southwestern Alberta store as much as 180 tonnes of carbon per hectare (72.9 tonnes per acre).

“Our wet grasslands are comparable to the boreal forest, which is shocking when I tell people that. Most people think forests hold more carbon — not true,” he said.

When a prairie soil is cultivated, a third to half of the carbon is lost to erosion or the furnace effect.

When a soil with lots of humus is cultivated, the insulation is lost. The surface is exposed to more sun and oxygen. Oxygenated soil allows the microbes to break down the carbon and release it.

Land-use conversion worldwide is contributing to rising CO₂ levels in the atmosphere.

Long-term plots at Stavely, Alta., south of Calgary showed 30 percent of the carbon disappeared from the soil after three years of cultivation.

Perennial forages are preferred over other crops to restore carbon. Tame forages are also bred to produce more above ground to feed cattle but they do not put enough carbon back into the soil.

Annual crops are bred to produce everything on the surface and put very little below ground and do not have vast root systems. They are not adding carbon back into the deep soil profile.

Some of Bork’s work focuses on refining grazing to enhance soil carbon and provide an incentive to producers to increase soil carbon.

There is no clear consensus on the value of managed grazing but his analysis showed benefits where the presence of grazing animals tended to boost and maintain soil carbon.

“With this overall grazing effect, we were very pleased to find with long-term exposure to grazing we found an increase of soil carbon of 12 percent,” he said.

Most was concentrated in the top 15 cm of soil.

These soil carbon increases were not uniform everywhere. The dry, mixed grasslands did not show much change but the other regions did.

Further research is asking why these changes are happening. It is not known for sure if cattle change soil microbes or enzyme activity in the soil. Other studies are looking at litter turnover and rates of decay. Grazed areas have more rapid litter decay and cattle may help incorporate it back into the soil with trampling.

Other work is examining plant species.

They found introduced plant species like timothy, brome, bluegrass and dandelion actually increased soil carbon. This causes a conflict among the grazing purists.

“I am going to argue they are good. Many of them are very high in forage quality,” he said.

Another data set from nine former Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration pastures in Saskatchewan

showed stocking rates have an effect on carbon sequestration.

“As you increase stocking rate, carbon increases,” he said.

Another unexpected result was the introduction of new plants.

Kentucky bluegrass litter decomposes rapidly and may contribute to carbon storage.

“Kentucky bluegrass appears to be adding something to these plant communities and it is introduced primarily through the presence of ongoing grazing,” he said.

A \$2 million project is looking at the effect of adaptive multi-paddock grazing. This is intensive grazing in a large area, divided into small paddocks with quick rotations. There is a long recovery period to restore the leaves and rebuild roots.

Sites in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba are being studied for plant communities, carbon sequestration and biodiversity.

Bork argues carbon losses and gains have a measurable value.

Carbon in Alberta is priced at \$30 per tonne based on the tax imposed on industrial emitters when they are above a certain threshold of CO₂ equivalents.

He estimates carbon retained in the existing grasslands is worth about \$9 billion based on the \$30 tonne equivalent.

“When you look at the carbon already lost because of what we have done to our landscapes, these numbers are staggering. The area of land in the Parkland that has been converted, and attach that \$30 per tonne CO₂ equivalent, the amount is almost \$23 billion. That is the value of the carbon that has been lost in the soils in the parkland region by converting them in the past,” he said.

Author: Barbara Duckworth—The Western Producer. Original article can be found at <https://www.producer.com/2019/11/researchers-make-case-for-grassland-benefits/>

Environmental Farm Plan Workshop



For Agricultural Producers that:

- Have never completed an Environmental Farm Plan (EFP)
- Have an EFP completed more than 10 years ago
- Wish to be eligible for cost sharing funding with various programs under the Canadian Agriculture Partnership (CAP)

Computer workstations will be available for you to use.
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**Rocky View County Hall
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Turning common heifer development logic on its head

From my earliest memories of reading farm magazines and attending cattle management conferences or seminars until now, there have been many ideas and opinions about how to develop and select replacement heifers. I am about to offer a perspective that will differ from most of what you have heard or read during these many years. I have interspersed much of it in these articles during my time as a writer. Now I will try to put it in this one piece.

Heifer development not only can be, but *should* be much simpler than we typically make it. Selection and development go hand in hand. They facilitate each other.

Most of you, because of “expert” advice you have received, have been over-developing your heifers. You have selected the biggest and prettiest heifers based on biased and subjective

criteria. I want to suggest that you change that approach.

You will need to start where you are with the cattle that you have; so most of you will want to take a few years to get to the point I suggest. Each step will tell you how big the next step may be.

I think nearly every herd has some good cows. My definition of good—those that get pregnant, deliver and raise a good, not necessarily excellent, calf every year without you ever touching them except for routine immunizations. The rest are inferior. In the long run, you want those cows to be the mothers of your replacement heifers; so raise more of them.

How do you do it? You keep nearly all of your heifer calves. You only remove the few that are obviously challenged or inferior.

This will usually be less than 5%

(maybe not at first, but keep most of them). You then shorten the heifer breeding season as fast as you dare until your bull and/or AI exposure is not more than 30 days, ideally 24.

If you have calving dates from previous years, you can see what percentage bred in 24, 45 or 65 days and can get an idea of how many days to expose this larger group of heifers. Because you will be keeping some later-born heifers and not developing them to gain as rapidly in addition to shortening the breeding season, you will need to expect a lower conception rate.

Now, instead of trying to get the heifers to 65% of expected mature cow weight, 55% will be enough. You may want to take a couple of years to get to that point. However, many have done it quickly.

(Continued on page 11)



Wishing you and
your family a Merry
Christmas!

May your holidays be merry, bright,
and filled with family and friends.

REGARDS,
THE BOARD AND STAFF OF FOOTHILLS FORAGE &
GRAZING ASSOCIATION



(Continued from page 10)

I hope you see how this more moderate or “minimal” development plays into heifer selection. With less input and size, the ones that conceive in a short season are truly the good heifers. They are more closely adapted to your environment.

Now the arguments start to come:

I won't be breeding the best heifers. You don't know which ones are the best. Let the bulls and the environment tell you which ones are best. They are the ones that get pregnant. There are very few, if any, people that can look and tell which ones will breed.

I don't want to keep that many heifers. Why not? Yearling operations are usually more profitable than cow-calf operations; and you should winter these calves like stockers going to grass. The only added expense is use of the bulls or AI.

Open heifers should be nicely profitable. Many people are hesitant to keep more heifers because of the cost of development. If the cost of development is high, that is a problem; and unless you can change that, you shouldn't be raising your own replacements.

Don't tell me that you need to develop your own heifers because they are better. If they were better, you could get a good breeding rate with less development cost. The added value of yearling heifers should be significantly more than the added cost.

I would like to use the genomic tools to evaluate the heifers before breeding them. Why? Those tools might give you some genetic tenden-

cy information, but it won't tell you which ones will get pregnant in the first 24 days. The bulls will.

The average heifer calving in the second cycle cannot live long enough for her lifetime production to catch up with the heifers that calve in the first cycle regardless of other genetic differences.

That heifer's mother isn't good enough to keep the daughter as a replacement. You are selling the wrong one. Sell the mother. If you are using good maternal bulls, the heifer calf should have a good chance of being better than her mother. If you are not using good maternal bulls, you need to find them or raise them or become a terminal breeder.

I might soon have more pregnant heifers than I need. Good. Now you have a marketing opportunity. You may sell the excess bred heifers. Or my recommendation is to keep the bred heifers and sell enough late bred cows to make room for the heifers that are going to calve early.

Many areas have buyers for cows bred to calve later than your calving season. Also, as you remove late-bred cows, your calving season will get shorter and the latest born heifer calves will be older and more likely to breed. You can see how the positive effects begin to multiply.

I don't think those “underdeveloped” heifers will make good cows. Research done by Rick Funston at the University of Nebraska and Andy Roberts at the Land and Range Research Station in Miles City, Mont., plus a bunch of personal practical experience says that they will

make better cows than the ones I am calling “over-developed.”

If you want to help them along a little, do it from the time

they are diagnosed pregnant as a yearling until they are checked pregnant as a 2-year old. That is the most difficult 12-month period of her life. You would much rather sell an open yearling than an open 2-year-old.

Now let's ring up the pluses:

When you start putting many heifers into your herd that will all calve early in the calving season, you will soon be able to shorten the cow calving season by removing late bred (less efficient and less adapted) cows. As your calving season gets shorter, the latest born heifer calves will be older and more likely to breed. Weaning weights will also increase.

In future years, more and more heifers should be eligible breeders.

As more of these heifers come into your herd, you will be able to remove the less desirable cows. Soon you will get by with less supplemental feed and have an increased level of herd health.

New marketing opportunities will show up. Remember the ranchers who are terminal crossing or should be. They need your excess cows. Even though the late calving cows are a little inferior for you, they could work very well for the terminal breeders, especially after a few years into your program.

Two more points: I am convinced that the heritability of fertility, under minimal heifer development and reduced cow herd inputs, is significantly higher than the estimates of low heritability that we usually hear. You need to buy or raise bulls that will not undo what you are trying to accomplish with your heifer development and cow culling.

Author: Bruce Teichert, a consultant on strategic planning for ranches, retired in 2010 as vice president and general manager of AgReserves, Inc. Original Article can be found at <https://www.beefmagazine.com/cow-calf/turning-common-heifer-development-logic-its-head>

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There are extra challenges in wintering cows this year



are 25 per cent lower than for a lactating cow. Having lower requirements may result in the cows gaining back the

Early weaning, supplement feed, and feeding vitamins earlier should be considered

With feed quality and quantity “all over the map this year,” producers face challenges weaning calves and maintaining cows, says a provincial beef and forage specialist.

“If calves were not provided with creep feed over the summer, weaning weights will be lower than in most years — as much as 150 pounds per animal,” said Barry Yarem-cio.

He suggests weaning calves 30 to 60 days early if cows have lost condition and are thin.

“The calves can then be put on a good ration to maintain good rates of gain,” he said. “Nutrient requirements for a dry cow

weight prior to the cold setting in. It is much easier for a cow to gain weight in the fall than in the cold winter months.”

Thin cows are another concern.

“If a cow is 200 pounds lighter than normal, a majority of the weight loss will be fat,” said Yarem-cio. “The loss of fat reduces the amount of insulation the cow has to shield itself against the cold. Heat loss increases energy requirements, which in turn requires the animal to eat more feed.”

A thin cow will need an extra 1,400 pounds of hay just to stay warm over the winter.

“For every 10 C drop below -20 C at noon, an additional two pounds of grain above the regular ration should be fed,” he said. “Over a three-week

cold spell, it is possible for cow weight to drop 100 pounds or more if additional grain is not fed.”

Poor conditions this year may have lowered vitamin levels in hay.

“Instead of waiting until the cows are in the last trimester, feeding of vitamins should start now to prevent deficiencies and nutrition-related problems.”

Another issue is that most forages are very low in protein and energy this year. In addition to supplemental feed, consider “feeding of an ionophore such as Rumensin or Bovatec (that) will improve digestive efficiency and allow the animals to get more out of the feeds they are eating.”

Author: Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. Original article can be found at <https://www.albertafarmexpress.ca/2019/11/21/there-are-extra-challenges-in-wintering-cows-this-year-2/>

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Vision: We envision a global community that respects and values profitable forage production and healthy soils as our legacy for future generations.

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