

Production Enhancement – Breeding Season (Length and Time of Year)
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Long breeding seasons result in long calving seasons. These extended seasons result in production of our beef product over a wide range of environmental and nutritional conditions. The product we produce, a calf, is non-uniform in size and maturity. Therefore, the calf crop is extremely difficult to market efficiently and the entire herd is more difficult to manage.

The advantages of a limited breeding/calving season are numerous. Annual herd health procedures can be performed at specific points in the growth and reproductive cycle. Calves need to be vaccinated between 4–6 months for Blackleg and respiratory viruses. If all of the calves are born in a 60-day period, you will only have to work the herd once a year to process all of the calves at the optimum age maximizing the efforts of vaccination with a minimum of labor and time. The cows can also be pregnancy checked all at the same time.

A limited calving period enables you to check the annual production and profitability of the herd. The Parameters that are measured include weaning weights, number of cows exposed to the bull weaning a live calf, cow condition and cow weights. It is much easier to do all of the weights at one time. You only have to get the herd in once to get your weaning weights.

Rational culling procedures and cull cow marketing can be used to maximize profit. As a group, cows can be pregnancy checked at weaning and marketed or fed to increase value. This grouping saves trips to the sale to market cattle. If you are culling and marketing cows at the same time as your neighbors you can share marketing and transportation costs. This will further reduce your individual cow marketing expense and result in greater return per cow. If you and your neighborhood group have large enough numbers, you can market your cows directly to harvest plants.

Limiting calving seasons also enhances maintaining your herd size. The management and breeding of replacement heifers is much easier if all of the heifers are of the same general age. Heifers can be weaned, fed separately, managed for maximum breeding efficiency and then ultimately calved together. This makes life a lot easier for the producer.

A limited calving season allows producers to take maximum advantage of the seasonal variation in forage quality and quantity. Cows nutritional needs vary with their stage of production, lowest at weaning and in second stage of gestation and highest at peak lactation at 60 days post calving. Therefore, if we calve 60 days before the highest quality and quantity of forage in our pastures, we match the forage production with our calving cycle nutritional demand. This will improve production and maximize profits.

Limited breeding seasons improve reproductive efficiency. A cow that is reproductively normal and her nutrition plan is matched to her needs will breed efficiently. Cows that are matched to their nutritional environment will begin cycling in less than sixty days post calving and a higher percent will settle. By using a limited breeding season you match the cows nutritional needs to the available forage and cows that do not breed under these circumstances are culled. This eliminates genetically inferior reproducing cows and future generations of your herd will be more reproductively efficient.

Limited breeding seasons allow producers to market a more uniform calf crop. This facilitates more uniform management of the calf crop. This includes preconditioning your calf crop by vaccinating, castrating, dehorning, weaning and deworming in uniform lots.

When using limited breeding seasons in a herd, more intense management and attention to detail are required to be productive. Furthermore, disease control must be rigorous. Bull semen quality, libido, and mating ability must be optimal. Gestation length can be reduced by genetic selection. Nutrition, hormonal and management can control post calving to estrus length. Not every producer will be able to put out the effort to limit the cowherd breeding season but for those who are able to make the effort will see an increase in herd profitability.