

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:** Gene Schmitz  
Livestock Specialist  
University of Missouri Extension  
(660) 438-5012  
schmitze@missouri.edu  
**Date** 3/14/14

### **Headline: Breeding Season Heifer Management**

WARSAW, Mo. – Breeding season for spring born beef heifers is rapidly approaching. Overall heifer management from now until the breeding season can have significant impacts on heifer fertility and pregnancy rates.

The first order of business is to make sure the heifers are big enough. Research and industry standards suggest heifers should weigh between 55 and 65 percent of their mature weight at breeding. If herd mature cow size is 1,400 pounds, heifers should be weighing between 770 and 910 pounds at breeding.

Now would be a good time to weigh heifers to see if they are on track to meet those targets. If not, feed can be increased to improve gains the last 60 to 90 days before the start of the breeding season, provided heifers are not too small. Pushing heifer gains above 2.5 to 3.0 pounds per day in order to meet target weights is not practical.

For producers using artificial insemination (AI), nutritional management after AI is critical to AI pregnancy rates. Many heifers are developed in drylot settings to meet target gains. Immediately after AI, they are then turned directly out on pasture. The pasture may be extremely lush, and heifers may not be able to consume enough dry matter to meet nutrient requirements, and thus lose weight for a few weeks.

Researchers at Purdue and University of Wyoming found heifers fed to maintain pre-breeding rate of gain for 21 days following AI had greater AI pregnancy rates than heifers fed to only meet maintenance requirements or lose weight for 21 days post-AI. Additional research at South Dakota State University and the University of Minnesota showed poorer quality embryos that were developmentally retarded in heifers that were nutritionally restricted immediately after AI.

Whether or not producers utilize AI, the bottom line is don't forget about heifers when they are turned out on grass. Short term supplementation to keep them on a positive plane of nutrition may be necessary in order to achieve acceptable pregnancy rates, especially for AI bred heifers.

Research into the area of fetal programming indicates severe nutritional restriction of dams has many effects on the gestating calf once it is born and throughout its' lifetime. Heifers being bred this year were conceived and in utero during the summer of 2012. There is research to suggest these heifers may show delayed puberty and lower pregnancy rates due to the nutritional stress their mother's experienced in 2012 and the winter of 2013 prior to calving. This is just something to keep in mind. At this point in time, there is no way to overcome this impact on the heifers. However, producers may want to keep a few more replacement heifers than normal to offset this possible depression of reproductive efficiency.

One final item that may affect the entire cow herd is the impact of this winter's extremely cold temperatures. Pregnancy rates of fall calving cows may be lowered, especially for cows that did not conceive early in the breeding season. An early pregnancy exam might be in order.

Don't forget about the bulls either. Scrotal frostbite is possible, and fertility may be greatly reduced. Schedule breeding soundness exams as soon as possible so problem bulls can be identified and replaced.

If you have questions on any of these topics, contact me at the Extension Center in Warsaw at (660) 438-5012 or by e-mail at [schmitze@missouri.edu](mailto:schmitze@missouri.edu). University of Missouri Extension is an equal opportunity / ADA institution.

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