PREP FOR THE BREEDING SEASON
Your 2014 calf crop depends on your good nutrition, breeding and management decisions early in 2013. Bunching the calf crop involves having your cows in a body condition score of 5 or 6 at calving. First-calf heifers need to be at least a 6 or they’ll be slow returning to heat. A 6 body condition score animal should not have any ribs or backbone showing. Supplemental feeding with a concentrate in the next month will speed their return to heat. Lick tubs may be convenient, but likely won’t provide the amount of energy needed to get them back in shape. Green forage and plenty of it works also.

Make sure your bull battery is also in a 6 BCS and have been given a breeding soundness exam and found to be satisfactory potential breeders. A BSE does not test for libido so it behooves you or someone to observe bulls at turnout. Some bulls are shy and you may have trouble seeing him actually breed a female.

I prefer bulls be used in single sire pastures, but sometimes that just isn’t practical. Don’t mix young bulls with older, more dominant bulls. The young bull may not get to breed very many females and the risk of injury is heightened. If two bulls are needed with a group of cows it’s best to utilize the sports approach to manage the bulls. You let one start but after a week bring another in from the bench and alternate them. This way you keep a fresh player in the breeding pasture.

As a rule, don’t expect a first-time, yearling bull to breed more than 20 females in a 60-75 day season. Yes, I know there are exceptions, but error on the side of safety. The old adage is to only expect a bull under 2 years of age to successfully breed the number of cows matching his age in months.

I hope more of you will be turning to artificial insemination this year. The technology is there just waiting for you and your associates to prepare for the most outstanding calf crop you’ve ever produced.

There are bulls in semen tanks that are “can’t miss bulls” when it comes to certain EPD traits. It may be growth, carcass merit, daughters milking ability, calving ease or whatever you need to change in your program.

Fixed-time AI is another tool available that helps bunch the calf crop in the first 2 weeks of the calving season. This program allows you to have 60 percent of your calves hit the ground close together out of the “can’t miss bull.”

The next step is to have a compatible cleanup bull that sires calves that at least look a lot like the AI calves. This is possible if you spend some money to buy a really nice cleanup bull. Young bulls don’t have the accuracy of the bull in the “tank” but pay attention to his EPDs as you match the strengths and weaknesses of the bulls you use.

OUTSTANDING CLEANUP BULLS
If you want a really outstanding cleanup bull, give our Southwest Missouri Beef Cattle Improvement Association’s bull sale on March 25 a close look. There are a number of bulls in it that rank in the top 10 percent of the bulls in their breed for several important EPD traits.

The sale is at the Springfield Livestock Marketing Center, just west of Springfield on I-44. Sale time is 7 p.m. Angus bulls are again the dominant breed with 30 consigned. We also have a few Simmental composites, Charolais, Polled Herefords and Lim-Flex. The catalog can be viewed, along with some bull pictures on-line at www.swmobcia.com.

Don’t make a bull purchase this spring without giving some thought to EPDs and your breeding plans.

BRANDING DEMONSTRATION
If you’re interested in learning more about branding cattle, plan to be at our branding demonstration on March 26, 1:30 p.m. at the Jackie Moore Ranch, Mt. Vernon. He’ll have enough calves that you’ll be able to test your skill at getting a legible brand with an electric iron. We’ll also demonstrate freeze branding on a few cattle.

The interest in branding has increased due to cattle theft. I encourage branding just to keep disputes down between neighbors if calves stray from your pasture. Also, good cattle carrying a brand, that’s readable, can become a marketing aid. It helps establish your reputation.

On the 26th we’ll discuss the Missouri brand law, talk about brand selection and an electric branding iron company rep will be in attendance to answer questions about designing a sensible brand.
Jackie’s place is 2 miles north of the junction of Missouri 174 at the north edge of Mt. Vernon on Missouri 39. Turn right or east on Lawrence County 2090 to the headquarters.

**WEED MANAGEMENT**
Most of you probably feel that you lost some of your permanent grass stand due to the weather in 2011 and 2012. You know what’s likely to come up in those vacant spots. Perhaps if the field was in fescue there will be some fescue seedlings showing up from last fall or this spring. However, you’re likely to have more weeds than you’d like. The fescue that survived will likely be “hot.”

At the Spring Forage Conference last month Kathy Voth from Colorado explained how she teaches cattle to eat weeds. It was intriguing but in reality most of you probably won’t take time to train your cows as she described.

Herbicides applied appropriately likely are the best solution. Check with an extension agronomist to get their take on what herbicide to use and when to apply it.

**BROKEN GENES**
Dr. Jerry Taylor, University of Missouri genomics professor briefed the regional livestock specialists at our February training about a sizeable grant he’s going to study broken genes. He said the broken genes can make animals susceptible to some diseases and conditions.

We are now helping gather field data on Angus heifers that carry over 50% Angus genetics that are being put through the Show-Me-Select heifer development program. The project involves pulling 20-30 tail switch hairs on the heifers as well as the service sire.

Taylor and his crew will be studying the gene makeup and see if there are broken recessive genes present. When both the service sire and the female have those recessive genes it very well could impact embryonic mortality in a negative way. The ultimate hope is to help develop an EPD for fertility. It could aid in explaining why some bulls may not have as great a pregnancy rate when used in a fixed-time AI program. Taylor’s grant will also cover genomic evaluation for feed intake, Residual Feed Intake, tenderness and fertility. This data will be returned to the heifers’ owner.

**QUALITY BEEF BY THE NUMBERS**
Another topic for our in-service was the QB program that seeks high quality feeder cattle to feed and market for attractive premiums. This program is a combined venture of our extension folks, three AI companies, two feedlots that specialize in feeding high quality grading cattle and certified Angus Beef.

Data will be gathered and given to the cow calf producer to help identify the “good” girls in the herd and those not-so-good. Mike Kasten, manager of the QB project makes a good point in his talks when he says you probably can’t tell the most valuable cows in your herd by looking at them. As of now, most of the data gathering for QB will be coordinated through the participating AI firm’s rep.

**$ BEEF**
A prospective bull buyer asked me what emphasis I place on the $ Beef index that some breeds offer in their EPD listing. I replied that when you examine the data that goes into its calculation you’ll not find any maternal type EPDs in it directly.

The $B is especially helpful if you’re retaining ownership and getting paid for post-weaning growth and carcass merit. The cow-calf raiser who sells calves at 7-8 months of age and saves heifers for replacements should direct more attention towards $Weaned Calf Value.

If you’re a top-quality marketeer and the bidders recognize from past experience that your cattle ring the bell in the feedlot and on the rail, you may be in a position to use the $B index effectively. Just don’t forget that if you save replacement heifers or sell heifers to someone that makes cows out of them, look beyond the $B.

**STEER FEEDOUT COMING UP**
The Missouri Steer Feedout for calves born from July 1 through October, 2012 is a good place to get your feet wet in the retained ownership business if you don’t wish to commit the whole calf crop. We accept as few as 5 head. You’ll get a chance to see how your steers do in the feedlot and in the carcass.

You’ll find out if you’re ready for QB when the carcass data comes back. If you wish to sample some of your steer calves, give me a call for entry forms. The deadline for entry is May 10. The steers will actually be picked up at Joplin Regional Stockyards in this part of the state on June 4. The calves should be weaned at least 28 days prior to delivery. We prefer they be weaned 45 days.

**JOHN JENNINGS THOUGHTS**
Recently, I heard John Jennings, Arkansas Extension forage specialist speak and here are a few of his turnip statements that should also apply to southwest Missouri. After all John is a Barry county native and worked a number of years in Howell county as the extension agronomy specialist.

John says he’s had better luck using the forage-type turnip compared to the purple top turnip. He felt you’ll have more regrowth. The forage turnip will make a nice large bulb if you don’t plant them too thick. He suggests no more than 5 pounds per acre in a pure stand. If planted with ryegrass or wheat he recommended 2-3 lbs. of turnips. His target date for planting is late August. Cattle may resist grazing the turnips at first but will take to them after a few days. Be sure and practice strip grazing for greatest efficiency.