Cattle Chat: Deciding when to remove the bulls from the breeding pastures

K-State beef cattle experts say bull health and labor availability are factors

By Lisa Moser, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — In agriculture, whether it is farming or ranching, there is a seasonal shift to the daily operations. And for spring-calving commercial herds, summer often means that the cows, calves and bulls are out grazing on summer pastures while the cows are also conceiving next spring’s calf crop.

For many producers, a 50- to 70-day calving season is ideal, said the experts at Kansas State University’s Beef Cattle Institute, who addressed this topic in a recent Cattle Chat podcast.

“Even though a short calving season is the goal, bred cows are worth more than open cows (ones who haven’t conceived) and so if we take the bulls away then we reduce the number of cows that will become pregnant,” K-State veterinarian Bob Larson said. “So, I’d keep the bulls out in the breeding pastures longer than 60 days but plan on culling the females that got bred late in the breeding season.”

However, there are times when bulls need to leave the pasture, K-State beef cattle nutritionist Phillip Lancaster said.

“As we move into mid to late summer, the forage quality starts to decline and some of the younger bulls may need to be separated off so they can be supplemented to keep them from getting too thin, especially if they are still growing,” Lancaster said.

Also, for males in multi-bull pastures, there is always a risk that they will fight over the females that they hope to breed, Lancaster said.

“Bull injury is a risk that can be avoided by reducing the number of bulls in the pasture,” Lancaster said. “A good option is to leave one or two older bulls out in the pasture to breed the last few open cows to add value but lessen the risk of injury.”
Another consideration is labor availability to remove the bulls from the pasture, Larson said.

“Evaluate the bulls when you are moving the herd for another reason, such as to apply fly control, and then you can leverage the labor on hand,” Larson said.

Larson added: “While I like a 60-day calving season, that does not mean it has to be a 60-day breeding season and there can be flexibility as to when the bulls can be removed from the pasture.”

To hear the full discussion, listen to Cattle Chat on your preferred streaming platform.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Beef Cattle Institute Cattle Chat podcast, https://ksubci.org/2024/07/05/removing-bulls-leaky-gut-ultrasonography/

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