Cattle Chat: Maintaining cow efficiency

Beef cattle experts share the factors that influence the well-being of the cow herd

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Efficiency is something many strive for, whether it is spending money wisely or making the most of the time dedicated to a project.

And for the beef producer, developing an efficient cow herd has financial implications, according to beef cattle experts who recently spoke on a Kansas State University Cattle Chat podcast.

Joining Beef Cattle Institute nutritionist Phillip Lancaster and veterinarians Bob Larson and Brian Lubbers was Twig Marston, field nutritionist with Hubbard Feeds, a division of Alltech. Each advocated for a different efficiency measurement priority.

Larson emphasized the importance of reproductive efficiency.

“Producers need to look at the number of calves weaned per cow exposed and you want that number to be high,” Larson said.

Lancaster stressed the role of nutrition in having an efficient cow herd.

“Nutritionally speaking, it is important to evaluate the amount of money spent on winter feed versus the amount of time cattle can graze the pastures,” Lancaster said.

These measurements influence the economics, according to Marston.

“Feed is going to be one of the greatest out of pocket expenses, so to be efficient you have to match their cows to your resources,” he said.

One way to track those expenses is through keeping good records, said the experts.

“If you can identify the inefficient individuals, then you change the management to improve the efficiency of the whole herd,” Lubbers said.

He also highlighted the importance of herd health.
“While nutrition and reproductive efficiencies can be harder to measure, I can count sick cows and they don’t perform well,” Lubbers said, “The beef animal’s health impacts how efficient it will be in all aspects of the factors already mentioned.”

Marston added: “Most producers are really trying to match their biological efficiency with their economic efficiency because they are trying to get a return on investment for each of their inputs, such as labor, equipment, feed, etc…”

To hear the full discussion, listen to the Cattle Chat podcast online.

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