

Column Name - The Heartland Minute

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“Cattle Grouping: Feeding Cows vs. Heifers”

According to veterinarians at the Kansas State University Beef Cattle Institute it is important to remember that metabolisms change throughout life for not just us, but our cattle as well. They advise that producers’ group first-calf heifers away from the mature cows in the months before calving. They quite simply have different nutritional needs. Bred heifers are approximately 80-85% of their mature weight, which gives them a 200-pound disadvantage when grouped with mature cows. This is important to note because of the dominance that cows have over heifers.

Often times cows will not let younger animals have complete access to feed and water, so it is important to give the younger, smaller heifers their own space where they do not have as heavy competition to eat. Also, there is a difference in the type and timing of the feed supplementation between cows and heifers. If you feed a cow herd like you would a growing heifer then those cows are going to be over-conditioned going in to the calving season. If those heifers calve 30 days ahead of the rest of the herd they will need to be switched to a lactation type of diet earlier than the cow herd. Since we are typically keeping a closer eye on heifers as we get closer to calving season to avoid complications, it would be nice to have them separated anyway.

Another factor to consider is whether you want to calve in a facility or on pasture. Much of this depends on what facilities you have available and what the chance is for severe weather. There is an increased risk for sickness when calving in barns, so it may be a better option to calve on pasture. The biggest cause of illness is related to air quality and the concentration of fecal materials and mud. However, it is nice to have a corner set up in the barn to have as an emergency station for calves that may get chilled in severely cold temperatures. Post-natal calf mortality is highest in the first 21 days after birth with most occurring in the first 72 hours after birth. If you often have problems with severe weather causing death loss you can consider altering your calving season to avoid the coldest temps. However, do not trade this off for breeding cattle in the peak of summer heat.

Information comes from K-State University Beef Cattle Institute veterinarians.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.