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VET'S VIEW

**Grant Dewell, DVM, Veterinary Diagnostic and
Production Animal Medicine, Iowa State University**

Time to look back

Summer is here and spring calving is over for the year. This is a good time to take a look back and rehash how the calving season went and what we can do to improve next year, while problems you may have had are fresh in your mind. Some things to think about include timing of the calving season, genetics and calf health.

Calving season timing

March is a traditional time to calve, but we can also have some weather issues. Would you be better off delaying calving to later in the year? If so, now is the time to adjust your breeding season. If moving calving dates does not work, what other options do you have? Would indoor confinement be an option? Several Iowa producers have implemented confinement cow operations. Any building projects should be initiated this summer so they are ready for next spring. Plan ahead and talk to your beef extension specialist about implementing one of these operations.

Genetics

Most producers tend to be consistent in their genetic selection. However, with the increased risk of genetic defects now might be a good time to shake up your genetic base. Cross breeding can not only decrease your risk of genetic defects but could improve health, fertility and survivability of your calf crop. Evaluation of your cowherd's mature profile can help you develop a genetic pathway to a cow that fits your operation's resources and management. If calving difficulty was a problem this past year then look for some calving ease bulls to reduce potential problems next year. If you have been aggressively selecting for low birth weight you may have solved any dystocia issues but calf growth may have been reduced resulting in smaller calves at weaning. Look at calving ease EPD's instead of only birth weight and try to get some growth back in your herd to take advantage of strong calf prices.

Calf health

It is difficult to take advantage of these high prices if calves are battling health issues in the first few months of life. If calf diarrhea was an issue, then implementing a modified Sandhills Calving System could be beneficial. Utilizing different calving areas as you progress through the calving season will help minimize the transfer of pathogens from older calves to young susceptible calves. Other issues such as contaminated dry lots or shelters can be improved by having alternate calving areas developed prior to the next calving season.

Finally, make sure that cow nutrition in late gestation is adequate. Plenty of forage and supplements should be available in January and February to meet the cow's nutritional needs and provide a healthy start for the calf. Discuss any other animal health issues and vaccine programs with your veterinarians so that you have a plan in place to meet your herd's needs.