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Culling decisions

Culling unproductive or problem cows is common exercise for cow-calf producers in the fall. However, the last few years have changed the way many producers think about cull cows. Relatively high prices received for cull cows had made culling easier and in some cases an easy access to cash. As the national cow herd starts to expand, culling decisions may need to be more carefully considered. Fundamentally, the cows that you should cull are the ones that are least likely to be profitable in the long term. Consider the following when you evaluate your cows this fall.

Open cows: Normally I would recommend that all open cows be culled as these cows have evidence that they are not as productive as other cows. However, with the high cost of replacement heifers a young open cow may be better value in the long run. The ISU heifer evaluation program on the Ag Decision Maker page can help you determine the value of retaining an open cow. Before you decide to keep an open cow determine why she is open. If she is a young cow whose ability to breed back was affected by the drought a few years ago then she is probably a fertile female but had some huge obstacles to overcome early in life. If this is not the first time she has been open then culling is probably the best decision.

Another consideration would be any potential for Trichomoniasis in the herd. Trich continues to spread to more cow herds here in Iowa. If the number of open cows is elevated test your herd for trich and cull any infected bulls and open cows. Have your veterinarian thoroughly exam any open cow you are considering retaining to make sure there is not some underlying problem.

Structural Soundness: In order to raise a

calf year after year and be profitable cows need to be healthy and sound. A cow that is slightly lame now that doesn't respond to treatment will have a harder time in late pregnancy and nursing a calf. Besides lameness, make sure her udder is sound structurally and she doesn't have eye problems or other blemishes that will adversely impact her ability to raise a calf and get pregnant again.

Age: Old cows that always wean a calf are the most profitable cows in your herd and age alone is not a reason to cull a cow. However, cows that are 9 years or older should be carefully evaluated to make sure that they will remain viable for another year. Check cows teeth to make sure they will still be able to forage for food.

Body Condition: A cow that is thin coming off pasture this year should be examined to determine what the underlying problem may be. She will probably need some supplemental feed this winter and should be sorted into a different management group at least. However, these cows need careful consideration as to their long term profitability in the herd.

Disposition and Phenotype: Normally, I would recommend culling any cow that does not have the proper disposition or phenotype. However, given the price of calves and replacement heifers, it will probably be most profitable to keep all females that have calves for the next few years. Any cow that is dangerous should be culled since calving tends to increase the chance that these cows may hurt you or someone else.

Ultimately, which cows you keep or cull is your decision and should fit the goals of your operation. For more assistance in making culling decisions contact your veterinarian or your Extension Beef Specialist.

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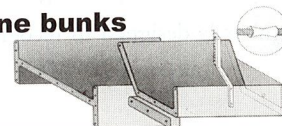


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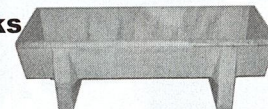
Fenceline bunks



Key Benefits

- Acts as both a feeder & a fence for human protection
- Rounded interiors reduce feed waste
- Camphor edges reduce neck abrasions
- Bunks align to form any length
- Bunks are poured with 7,500 psi concrete
- Reinforced with solid rebar frame welded in place
- Optional concrete ends with drain holes available
- Features recessed post to prevent cattle from rubbing on post or cable
- Cable shim reduces wear & lengthens the life of cable
- Concrete step poured in the end of each bunk provides support for adjacent bunk
- Optional end steps are also available

Yard bunks



Key Benefits

- Allows livestock to feed from both sides and ends.
- Rounded interiors reduce feed waste and prevent damage from freezing.
- Rounded camphor edges reduce neck abrasions.
- Solid concrete ends feature drain holes. Drain holes may be plugged for use as a waterer.
- Concrete footing poured on the end of each bunk keeps feed at the appropriate height.
- Bunks are poured with 7,500 psi concrete using 3/8-inch aggregate reinforced with solid 1/2" rebar on 6"x 6" wire mesh squares.