

Preg Check Your Cows

There are many reasons to preg check your cows, but this year add to the list, high hay costs. Early detection of non-pregnant cows is the main benefit from pregnancy testing, but there are others.

In many cases, the age of the calf and the likely calving date can be estimated during rectal palpation. Cows expected to calve early can then be separated from cows expected to calve late. This can provide a useful basis on which to cull cows if it is necessary to reduce herd size, perhaps in times of feed shortage. The calving spread can also be quickly reduced if late-calving cows are replaced with heifers that conceived early.

Various abnormalities responsible for infertility in cows can also be identified. The more common of these include cystic ovaries and uterine infection. The occasional freemartin heifer and other abnormalities of the reproductive organs may also be detected during rectal palpation. Diseases and management problems affecting the whole herd can also be identified much earlier if cattle are pregnancy tested. Low pregnancy rates in one particular mob, for example, might indicate problems with an individual bull. Poor fertility throughout the whole herd might be caused by an infectious disease, or perhaps inadequate nutrition prior to mating.

There are three ways to pregnancy test cows.

Rectal palpation. At 45 to 60 days post-breeding, this method allows producers to have immediate results while the cow is standing in the chute. The biggest drawback, is human error can come into play based on the skill level of the technician.

Ultrasound. Another option for producers wanting immediate results is ultrasound. This method offers high accuracy readings at 28 to 35 days-post breeding. Technicians can also determine the sex of the calf based off the ultrasound. There is some additional cost for the technician and technology.

Blood tests are highly accurate, a 99% detection of open females and 95% detection of bred females. Tests must be taken at least 28 days post-breeding, and at least 75 days post-calving. Females can't be sorted out right from the chute because the tests often take at least a couple of days to be processed. However, collecting samples requires little training and can be done by producers themselves. This process works best if producers use an adequate individual identification system for females, so open cows can accurately be found and sorted out from the group when the test results are returned.

Whichever method you choose to use, afterwards you can make an informed decision on the future of that cow.