

FEBRUARY 2006

**CALFHOOD VACCINATION:** Otherwise known as brucellosis vaccination, calfhoo vaccination seems again to be of interest to cattle buyers. The word from people attending the sale barn is that heifers vaccinated for brucellosis will again bring a premium at sale. Brucellosis vaccination between 4 and 8 months of age became 'optional' a number of years ago with the Dept of Ag. Some farms raising their own replacements and not selling heifers saw no benefit from the vaccination status and stopped calfhoo vaccination. Some farms however sell heifers. It seems the change in interest at the sale barn now is fueled by the fact that western states (purchasing heifers) require brucellosis vaccination for import. Specifically, Washington State has that import requirement. Idaho also has that import requirement, and now also recently lost its brucellosis 'free' status. These states in particular drive the interest in vaccination status.

Please note that if you haven't brucellosis vaccinated calves in your herd for some time, that calves receiving vaccine will have a more substantial reaction (fever, off feed) than when the herd was under routine vaccine use. The reaction lasts approximately 24 hours. The age range for vaccination is now 4-12 months of age. Remember that vaccinating yearlings is a miserable job. Please stay toward the lower age range for routine work.

**CONCEPTION RATES:** A variety of methods are now used commonly for getting cows pregnant; varying from bull natural service, to standing heat breeding, to ov-synch and CIDR programs. Some dairymen are hesitant to use some of the 'breeding programs' aside from standing heat because they feel the programs don't work. However let's review how conception typically goes in a herd of healthy well-fed cattle. Our experience with observed and recorded bull breeding is that a good active bull actually only has about 50% conception. This means he has to breed a cow on average in two heat periods to achieve pregnancy. Not too impressive! By comparison, breeding cows on standing heat with artificial insemination is generally very comparable. Many farms achieve 50% conception on routine AI service, with the benefit of better genetics. Interestingly though many farms do not have great conception, only achieving 35-40% conception on standing heat. Cow factors might affect conception. Heat detection decisions and breeding timing vary widely between farms and both affect conception. Breeding technique has a big impact on the success of any AI breeding. In comparison, breeding cows to ov-synch programs, CIDR programs, etc, statistically in large herd situations will provide approximately 35% or greater conception. In our smaller herd situations (where cows receive more individualized attention), we often achieve 40% conception. Please note that while these rates are lower than breeding on heat, you do have a guaranteed service with these programs. Compare with breeding on standing heat, and if the cow never shows heat, you will have 0% conception.

If you are achieving much lower pregnancy success (on the order of 25% or less) with a timed 'breeding program' or standing heats, then your situation warrants investigation. There may be problems with your cows either nutritionally or with infectious disease, or there may be issues with breeding technique being used. Follow recommended protocols closely to maximize conception. Breeding protocols are based on the cow and how her body works. Timing is very important. Often we try to 'tweak' these programs to suit our schedules. This isn't a good idea as it may lower conception rates

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