

Post Rock Answers

Week of: 2/19/18 – 2/23/18

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Post Rock District – Livestock

Enhance Breed-Back Rates in the Cow Herd

Having a live calf is the name of the game in our industry. However as calving season comes and goes and cows enter early lactation, we are here to remind them of one simple fact: there's no rest for the weary. Not long post-partum, we need our females to be in the right condition to not only manage maintenance and lactation, but to also restart their reproductive system and breed back early.

How do we go about ensuring that our cows are receiving adequate nutrition and will be ready to go when breeding season comes? The first step is to honestly and objectively establish body condition score. Brood cows' nutritional requirement will increase substantially post-calving and we understand that for best results, we need to have them in a BCS of 5 at calving. There are numerous studies showing that females who fall below this threshold are sure to have more trouble in the ensuing breeding season. While most producers do not have to worry about over conditioned cows, it's important to note that cattle in excessive flesh (BCS 8, for example) may actually inhibit reproductive activity and also have trouble breeding back. Throughout post-partum stage it will be imperative to not only meet nutritional requirements but to keep cattle on an increasing plane of nutrition. As with many aspects of nutrition, if we wait until the first day of breeding season to make adjustments, we will be behind the eight ball. Days leading up to calving and right now are great time periods to assess your females and put a plan in place to get to the "sweet spot" of a BCS 5-6. Body Condition Scoring is a service that I would be glad to assist any producer with, whether it be establishing guidelines or simply laying an unbiased set of eyes on any group of cows, don't hesitate to give me a call.

Protein and energy reign supreme and, as you might have guessed, are the number one consideration this time of year; however, mineral programs are also essential to peak reproduction. Mineral supplementation has been proven to make an impact. Vitamin E is a big factor influencing reproduction as well as things such as retained placentas or mastitis. Vitamin E will be the most obtainable from lush green grass. Unfortunately, this year many producers may be planning to feed cows a bit later into the season given the current grass conditions. Stored silage or baled forage are not your greatest resource for vitamin E as it will typically deplete 6 months after when the feed was harvested. A good working relationship with your veterinarian, mineral company, or myself is imperative to building an appropriate nutrition plan to ensure that your cow herd is receiving the right supplementation to have a successful breeding season.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Barrett may be contacted at Barrett8@ksu.edu or by calling Smith Center, 282-6823, Beloit 738-3597, Lincoln 524-4432, Mankato 378-3174, or Osborne 346-2521. Join us on

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