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Left: With good nutritional care, replacement heifers reach puberty around 12 months of age.

READYING REPLACEMENT HEIFERS

K-State experts offer advice on getting heifers prepared for their first breeding season.

by Lisa Moser, Kansas State University

Anyone who has lived with teenagers can attest their food consumption can be high as they rapidly grow to their adult size. In much the same way, growing replacement heifers need to have their nutritional needs met so they reach puberty at around 12 months of age, said Kansas State University veterinarian Bob Larson during a recent Beef Cattle Institute (BCI) *Cattle Chat* podcast.

“Research has shown that with a good nutritional plan, it is reasonable to expect replacement heifers to reach maturity between

11 and 13 months of age,” Larson said.

For spring-calving herds grazing dormant grass or cornstalks in the

winter, Larson advised that supplementation may be needed for optimal growth.

Veterinarian and BCI director Brad White added that January is a great time to assess the condition of the replacement heifers and plan for the necessary gain needed for breeding in the late spring.

“As we are evaluating the replacement heifer now, we need to think about how many days are left until breeding season and

think about the target weight we want her to be at,” White said. “To estimate the rate of gain, take the amount of gain needed divided by the number of days left until breeding.”

For most replacement females 9 months of age, Larson said, that gain will range from 1 to 2 pounds (lb.) of gain per day.

“Heifers that will weigh 1,200 to 1,300 pounds when they are mature will typically reach puberty by the time they weigh 750 to 850 pounds,” Larson said.

To get the most accurate measurement of weight, the veterinarians advise taking the heifers somewhere to be weighed.

“I cannot eyeball weight accurately, so I really have to run them across a scale,” Larson said.

White added: “Weight can be estimated by loading a group on the trailer and driving them across the scale to give you an idea of the average weight of the group.”

To hear more of this discussion, listen in to the BCI *Cattle Chat* podcast online at <http://bit.ly/ABB-BCI-heifers>. |

Editor’s note: Lisa Moser is an instructor of ag communications and journalism at K-State.