

One Calving Season, or Two?

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by
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Spring and autumn have become the seasons of choice for calving seasons in Oklahoma, but tremendous

differences exist as to what months within each of those seasons are primary times for most of the calves to be born.

“Deciding on the use of one calving season or two is a big first step, with many fall calving seasons having arose from elongated spring seasons,” said Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University cattle reproduction specialist. “Two calving seasons fit best for herds with more than 80 cows.”

To take full advantage of the economies of scale, a ranch needs to produce at least 20 steer calves in the same season to realize the price advantage associated with increased lot size.

Therefore,

having 40 cows in each season as a minimum is a general recommendation by animal scientists.

“Using two seasons instead of just one can reduce bull costs a great deal,” Selk said. “Properly developed and cared-for bulls can be used in both the fall and the spring, therefore reducing the bull battery by half.”

Another small advantage to having two calving seasons is the capability of taking fall-born heifers and holding them another few months to go into the spring season, and vice versa.

“Because of this, replacement heifers are always 2½ years [old] at first calving instead of 2 years of age,” Selk said. “These heifers should be more likely to breed early in the breeding season and have slightly less calving difficulty. Research has shown that these differences are very small, therefore the cost of the additional six months being fed must be minimal to make this a paying proposition.”

Many producers have reported they like dual calving seasons because of the spread of the marketing risk. Having half of the calf crop sold at two different

times allows for some smoothing of the “roller coaster ride” often associated with cattle price cycles.

Heifers that are exposed to the bull or the insemination gun for the first time when they are about 18 months of age will be too old to go directly to the feedlot if they fail to breed.

Selk cautions that the culled, open heifers will be marketed as young cows and will sell for a much lower — about \$30 per hundredweight (cwt.) lower — price than culled heifers scheduled to be bred at 13 months to 15 months of age.

“Ranchers that use two breeding seasons need to consider this price discount when deciding to hold the heifers the extra six months before putting them in the breeding pasture,” he said.

Selk added there are always “pros and cons” to two breeding seasons. His suggestion: Ranchers should do applied research to find out what makes the best sense for their specific cattle enterprise. After all, there are plenty of successful cow-calf operations that utilize either one-season or two-season breeding management models.

