

Ready to Rebuild *(from page 30)*

and we do receive carcass data back on them.”

Eggers is adamant that herd rebuilding doesn't begin with just any run-of-the-mill heifer. “We have got to be diligent in the kind of females we work with in the herd-rebuilding process,” he notes. “You don't want to keep just any female. You have to start with quality.”

Long-time SMS program consignor Doug Crooks would agree and says the program has helped improve his cow herd through the use of AI genetics.

“It's also helped our customers that have purchased our SMS heifers. [They] are getting cattle with better genetics,” he says.

Crooks notes that his customers report quicker breed-back time from the heifers. “Both the cows and their calves perform well.”

Crooks, who farms near Leeton, Mo., in partnership with his father and brother-in-law, says the SMS program heifer has longevity built into her. “You can buy with confidence that you are getting a quality animal that's guaranteed to be bred to a calving-ease bull with quality genetics and accuracy behind him,” he says. “So, you have a better chance at getting a good, live calf on the ground.”

Even if a consignor chooses not to market his heifers through the sale, Crooks says the SMS program has set precedence. “It can be a tool to help producers who are just wanting to raise replacements for themselves.”



According to Jackson, Mo., cattleman Richard Eggers, herd rebuilding doesn't begin with just any run-of-the-mill heifer. “We have got to be diligent in the kind of females we work with in the herd-rebuilding process,” he notes. “You don't want to keep just any female. You have to start with quality.”

Efficiency is key

Purchasing SMS heifers may be more economical and faster than raising heifers to expand the beef herd, Cole maintains. The SMS program can give buyers greater assurance that they are putting a good, long-lived replacement heifer in

the herd, he says. “The prebreeding, early pregnancy testing and visual evaluation by a third party contribute to that assurance.”

For buyers like Casey, the SMS program is a win-win, offering superior-quality genetics and opening the door of opportunity for him to expand his herd.

“It's a good program to help replenish the nation's cow herd,” Casey says simply.



Editor's Note: Joann Pipkin is a cattlemaster and freelance writer from Republic, Mo.

Heifer program designed to aid in building healthy Kansas beef herds

A new program aimed at supporting beef cattle producers by improving the reproductive performance of replacement heifers may have come at an opportune time.

The Sunflower Supreme program developed by Kansas State University (K-State) and the Kansas Department of Agriculture addresses dystocia, or calving difficulties in heifers, as well as whole-herd health and successful breeding techniques.

This may be an especially good year to launch this program, says Jaymelynn Farney, animal science specialist with K-State Research and Extension. Recent drought conditions and related market forces pushed the number of cattle in U.S. herds to 90.8 million head as of Jan. 1, 2013 — the lowest level since 1952, according to the USDA, but there are signals some producers are beginning to expand their herds.

“At this point we are starting [the program] in southeast Kansas, but hope to make it a statewide program by next fall,” says Farney, who is based in Parsons. “As part of this program, producers adopt effective health protocols and use some of the latest technologies and genetic tools with the end goal of improving herd health.”

Ways to manage for dystocia concerns include using expected progeny differences (EPDs). Two valuable EPDs to use with first-calf heifers are calving ease and birth weight.

“All breed associations report birth weight, and

several report calving ease,” Farney says. “Calving ease is a better indicator of dystocia concerns in first-calf heifers because it indicates the influence of the sire on calving ease in purebred females calving at 2 years of age.”

Calving ease (CE) is reported as a percentage, so producers should select sires with a higher calving-ease value, which should indicate a higher percentage of unassisted calving among first-calf heifers. Calving ease combines multiple measured traits of a bull's progeny, including birth weight, calving score of first-calf heifers and genomic values, to provide an easy-to-understand EPD to further improve dystocia concerns.

For some producers, being involved in the program will mean more recordkeeping, but they will be surprised how beneficial that can be, Farney says.

Meetings on heifer health, breeding success, nutrition, genetic evaluation and marketing are planned for those who enroll. A quarterly newsletter and videos will provide practical, day-to-day management tips.

The Sunflower Supreme program also aims to improve relationships between producers and veterinarians to identify a whole-herd health-management program, she says, with a focus on respiratory and reproductive health. Vaccination guidelines that are part of the program can be adapted to any operation with guidance from a veterinarian about type and booster requirements of each vaccine.

The program requires participants to receive Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) training, which encourages correct management techniques, Farney says. This also helps guide producers as they start livestock welfare programs and can open marketing opportunities.

Heifers that breed earlier in life have a more productive lifetime and greater profitability, Farney says. By choosing a breeding strategy and synchronization protocol, the program aims to help producers improve reproductive success. To that end, a breeding soundness exam must be completed 45 days prior to breeding to further evaluate heifers and provide enhanced reproductive success.

“We designed this program to be an educational tool for producers,” Farney says, adding that all of the guidelines can be adopted in any operation that raises replacement females. “With expanded collaboration between producers, extension and local veterinarians, this program will add value and additional revenue to Kansas cow herds and provide quality replacement heifers to increase the demand for Kansas cattle.”

Producers interested in participating in the program should contact their county or district K-State Research and Extension agent or visit www.sunflowersupreme.org for additional information.

— by **Mary Lou Peter**,
K-State Research and Extension