

# Summer Calving Success

10:30 a.m. session, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2005

Presenter: Mark McCarty, Two Dot Ranch, Cody, Wyo.

RAPID CITY, S.D. (Dec. 8, 2005) — Wyoming rancher Mark McCarty shared with Range Beef Cow Symposium attendees why his family made the switch to summer calving. “We used to do things the hardest way possible,” he said. “We calved at the coldest time (February and March). We calved every animal through the barn, fed hay, etc.”



**Rancher Mark McCarty described his conversion to summer calving.** [PHOTO BY LYNN GORDON]

Then, in the mid-1990s, Mark and his dad dispersed their small herd of purebred Gelbvieh and acquired an additional ranch to manage along with their family ranch. The new acquisition was the Two Dot Ranch, formerly part of Deseret Ranch. The cows they also acquired were bred to calve in June. So, McCarty began a comparison of winter calving their family cow herd vs. summer calving the Two Dot herd.

He quickly realized he liked summer calving and, after evaluating if they had enough forage resources to graze year-round, decided to make the switch to summer in the family cow herd as well. They are now going into their third cycle of only summer calving.

McCarty says the first thing he noticed after they made the switch was elimination of their scour problem. “As a result of that, we are shipping more calves than we used to at weaning,” he said. Their weaning rate per cow exposed has increased from about 91.5% to 93.85%.

McCarty said another benefit from summer calving is reduced feed costs. Specifically, he reduced annual hay cost by \$76 per cow and feeds hay for only 35-40 days per year, which equates to less labor as well. By matching their cows’ needs to the available forage, the McCarty’s have been able to reduce mineral needs by 19 pounds (lb.) per cow per year and supplemental protein costs by \$12 per head per year.

A pleasant surprise, the weight per day of age (WDA) of the summer-born calves has increased by about 1 lb. per day, said the Wyoming cattleman.

McCarty said he likes the flexibility his summer-calving program offers. “We can wean light calves and sell them right off the cow and take advantage of good prices — as we’ve done the last couple years — or we have the ability to over-winter the calves, depending on the market, and sell them as stockers the following spring.”

Cows have performed well with the new system. Pregnancy rates have improved from 93% to 96%, which McCarty attributed to the cows' ability to better maintain body condition scores with summer calving.

McCarty concluded by saying summer calving won't be for everyone. He pointed out that to make it economical, you've got to have the ability for year-round grazing.

"It worked for us, and I'm definitely glad we made the switch," he said

— by Kindra Gordon, field editor, Angus Productions Inc.

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