

New Strategies for Heifer Development

9 a.m. session, Wednesday, Dec. 7, 2005

Presenter: Trey Patterson, Padlock Ranch, Rancheater, Wyo.

RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA (Dec. 7, 2005) — When it comes to developing replacement females, Trey Patterson, formerly a South Dakota State University Extension beef specialist and presently with the Padlock Ranch in Wyoming, suggests there are different ways to do things. At the 2005 Range Beef Cow Symposium, Patterson went so far as suggesting it might even be OK to sell open heifers.

Patterson explained that with heifers the goal is often to get as many bred as possible, but when considering costs, “maybe that should shift from maximum to optimum reproduction. ... Spending more money to get maximum females bred can actually decrease profits on the ranch.”

In moving toward optimum reproduction as a more cost-effective goal, Patterson suggested producers rethink having heifers at 60%-65% of their mature weight by breeding season. Instead, he suggests keeping heifers smaller and getting them to 50%-55% of mature weight. “Cattle have changed so much since that initial target was set,” he explained.

Patterson said there is no denying weight influences puberty, and age of puberty is also affected somewhat by breed. A 910-pound (lb.) heifer is possibly necessary for maximum reproduction, he added, but not for optimum reproduction.

Patterson shared recent research showing a heifer group with an average weight of 638 lb. can still have a 90% pregnancy rate. Another study where heifers were fed to 50% of their mature weight had 87% pregnancy rates.

Patterson concluded by saying there is more risk of reproductive failure if heifers are developed at smaller weights, but there is also less development cost. In those scenarios, he pointed out, it may be a paying proposition to sell the open heifers. Smaller development weights may mean smaller cows, he said. “That’s a plus, because it means lower maintenance requirements, which translates to less feed.”

Patterson said the Padlock Ranch will be producing its crossbred females with this new concept of smaller development weights, and they believe it will be a success.



Trey Patterson of Padlock Ranch said developing heifers to 50%-55% of their mature weight by breeding may be more optimal than the traditional 60%-65% target.
[PHOTO BY LYNN GORDON]

“We think we can build a better young cow that will have lower inputs,” he said.

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