

## **Re-breeding open cows for fall calves**

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Conventional wisdom has held that open cows should be sold after pregnancy detection; either immediately or after a feeding period to add weight and avoid low prices for cull cows that are typically observed in the fall. However, considering current economic conditions in the cattle business should this practice always be followed without question?

Exposing open cows for a fall calving season may make economic sense this year. The value of all classes of cattle has increased greatly in the last year at the same time that feed costs have decreased. Currently a 1250 pound young cow is very similar in value to a feeder calf suitable for backgrounding. Using today's cheaper feedstuffs and the existing bull battery, she could be exposed to breeding for a fall calf. Thus there may be an opportunity in some cases to increase ranch profitability by breeding open cows, either as a complement to the spring-calving herd, or to be sold to other producers looking for fall-calving cows.

The best candidates for this strategy would be young cows that have the most productive life remaining and the greatest potential for added value when sold later as a bred cow compared to her current value as a cull cow. Older cows would not be great candidates for this strategy because they have much less productive life remaining and it's unlikely that there would be enough extra value to capture to make the effort worthwhile. The situation is very similar with yearling heifers; their value as open feedlot heifers will be relatively high compared to what they would be worth as a fall-bred female. Another important factor to consider with yearling heifers is that reproductive failure in these cattle is much more likely to be caused by inherent fertility problems that wouldn't be corrected with additional chances at breeding.

A concern that some producers might have is that re-breeding open females might perpetuate genetics associated with poorer fertility. That is a valid concern, especially if these cows were used to produce replacements, or if these are young females with little or no history of reproductive success. This becomes much less of a concern if these cows are used in a terminal system where all calves end up in the feedlot. If this strategy is followed, accurate production records should be kept to make sure that cows are only given one extra chance, and not carried over multiple times.

Another factor that needs to be accounted for is feed supply. If there is any question that the feed supply on the ranch will not be sufficient to make it until the start of the grazing season next spring, open cows should be culled regardless of age. The surest way to reap the rewards that the marketplace is offering to keep as many productive cows in the herd as the available feed supply will support. If available feed supplies are limited, retaining additional cattle that won't produce calves next spring makes little sense if that decision leads to premature culling or liquidation.