

NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF BEEF FEMALES CRITICAL DURING BREEDING SEASON

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The nutritional status or the body condition of beef females during the breeding season has a great impact on their reproductive performance. “Thin” cows will generally experience reduced reproductive performance.

The breeding season for late winter - early spring calving herds in Tennessee will be getting underway around the first of April. Generally, high quality forage is available during this time in most parts of Tennessee and will stimulate gain in condition and weight which will have a positive effect on rebreeding, Fescue and Ladino clover pastures or Orchardgrass and Ladino clover pastures will be of very high quality during the spring and will stimulate gain in both condition and weight.

Mature beef cows should calve in a Body Condition Score (BCS) of 5 to experience profitable levels of reproduction BCS range from 1-9 with 1 being extremely emaciated and 9 being extremely fat. If these cows lose condition following calving and into the breeding season, they will have reduced rebreeding while those that gain in both condition and weight will experience a higher level of rebreeding.

The beef female’s nutritional needs are greatest following calving than at any other stage during her production cycle. The nutrient demand for milk production drastically increases both the energy and protein needs. The energy, Total Digestible Nutrients (TDN) density of the ration will need to be in the 58 to 60 percent range and 10 to 12 crude protein. Generally, good quality pasture will provide the nutrient needs.

Cows “thin” at calving, (BCS <4), and can gain weight during the breeding season will have a better opportunity to get pregnant than if they lose weight. These cows may not get bred in a do-day period.

It is even a greater challenge to have first-calf cows gain weight following calving. These females will require both a higher quality feed and a longer period of time to recover from calving to have acceptable rebreeding performance. These females will need to gain 1.5 to 2.0 pounds per day during the breeding season. They should be managed separately from the mature cow herd.

Due to selecting for improved weaning weight and improved milk production, these first calf cows will be even a greater problem rebreeding on time. These cows will not be able to achieve top reproductive performance on most Tennessee pastures. They will require supplementation with both energy and protein in most situations.

Without good quality pasture, mature cows will need to be supplemented with 5.0 pounds of concentrate while first calf cows should be provided on energy and protein supplement of about 1.0 percent of their weight.

Developing the breeding season to coincide with the availability of high quality pasture will help to ensure adequate nutrition to stimulate gain in condition and weight of the beef females. Under most Tennessee conditions, this will be from the first of April to the last of June.