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Making More With Fewer Cows

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Cattle producers

in the Southern Great Plains had to reduce cow numbers in 2011 due to the most severe drought in decades. Replacement cow prices are

at an all-time high in 2012, and most pastures are still in poor condition, making it difficult for many producers to restock to former levels.

Producers often have a financial goal – obtaining a certain amount of revenue from the ranch that allows them to pay all the bills. With fewer cows on the ranch, it can become more difficult to fill the financial gap. The high market prices being paid for weaned calves have helped to overcome some of the financial gap, but not all of it. So how can a rancher bridge the financial gap if they don't have as many cows on the ranch as usual?

Part of the answer lies in stacking value-added traits to the calf crop and front-loading the calving season with as many early-born calves as possible.

When prices are as high as they are now, it is easy to forego any additional management. You can likely do nothing and still make more per head than you ever have before. But, rather than taking this approach, adding valuable traits to the calf can allow

Shifting a calf crop to more early calves

Typical Calving Interval, 120 days

| Calving interval, days | Percent calves born in each interval | Number of head | Age at weaning | Weight per day of age | Total pounds weaned |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1-30 | 20 | 10 | 213 | 2.78 | 5,912 |
| 31-60 | 30 | 15 | 183 | 2.84 | 7,788 |
| 61-90 | 35 | 17 | 153 | 2.92 | 7,602 |
| 91-120 | 15 | 8 | 123 | 3.05 | 3,002 |
| Total pounds weaned | | | | | 24,304 |
| Total value of calf crop sold* | | @ | \$1.65/lb | \$40,065 | |

Ideal Calving Interval, 90 days

| Calving interval, days | Percent calves born in each interval | Number of head | Age at weaning | Weight per day of age | Total pounds weaned |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1-30 | 60 | 30 | 213 | 2.78 | 17,736 |
| 31-60 | 30 | 15 | 183 | 2.84 | 7,788 |
| 61-90 | 10 | 5 | 153 | 2.92 | 2,236 |
| Total pounds weaned | | | | | 27,760 |
| Total value of calf crop sold* | | @ | \$1.61/lb | \$44,769 | |
| Difference between scenarios | | | | | \$4,703 |

*Prices determined for an Oct. 15, 2012, sale date using forecasting tools at <http://www.beefbasis.com>

you to make even more money than before. Some traits a producer should take advantage of are castration, de-horning, vaccinations, deworming the calves and cows, and backgrounding the calves after weaning. Numerous articles have been written about this subject in recent years. Most suggest that a producer can increase the value

of a weaned calf from \$5 to \$20 per hundredweight sold.

An additional way to increase profitability is to have as many cows calve within the first 30 days of the calving season as possible. This can be achieved by using estrus synchronization techniques or simply by purchasing females that will calve in ►

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the first 30 days of the calving season. The included table shows that a shorter calving season with a majority of the calves born early can increase gross revenue over 11 percent in a herd with 50 calves.

When the ranch still has the same number of bills to pay and fewer cows

to do it with, it becomes even more important to add as much value as you can to each calf sold. The \$4,700 increase in gross revenue in this example does not include the added value of the calves if you stack the value traits previously mentioned.

With a little thought and work up front, ranchers can increase the profitability of the ranch even when they have fewer cattle than before. This will help bridge the financial gap caused by not having as many cows on the ranch. ■