

Checking Cattle Pregnancy

REASON

Our main goal in the cattle industry is to produce calves. An optimal goal is for a cow to produce one calf every 365 days (one year). This can be difficult at times because producers have to ensure that a cow is being bred on her first or second cycle, after giving birth to her calf. The reason for this goal is the cost of maintaining a cow is expensive. If the female cow is not bred, then she is eating food that is an expense, without revenue.

In order to reach this goal, producers must try to be as efficient in their breeding operation as possible. They must know when a cow is bred, or pregnant, and when she is not. If a cow is not pregnant, the producer either needs to put the female with a bull, artificially inseminate the female, or cull (sale) the cow.

To make this decision accurately, the producer must ensure that the cow is not pregnant. There are a couple of methods that a producer can use to ensure this information, which includes ultrasound, palpation, and blood testing. Producers are unable to ultrasound their animals unless they are a veterinarian or hire a veterinarian to do it for them. This can be expensive. Some producers do palpate on their own, and are successful in this method. However, not all producers are trained to do this properly. The best and most cost-effective option for small scale producers is to utilize the blood testing method.

COST EFFECTIVE, EASY METHOD

The blood testing method can be utilized by any producer who can handle their cattle and give vaccinations, after being trained by a knowledgeable person. The blood of the cattle is taken from a major vein in the tail. This vein is easily accessible and safe to draw blood from. The blood is then sent off to a laboratory where a protein is detected, to determine if the animal is pregnant. Typically, the results are sent back to the producer in under four days, providing the producer with the tools they need in determining what decision needs to be made. This method is relatively cheap. It cost only \$2.50 per test, per cow, in addition to shipping.

If you would like help checking your cattle for pregnancy, please contact Michelle South, Extension Agent-Livestock, at 828-733-8270, or by email at michelle_south@ncsu.edu.