

How Many Heifers Should be Kept?

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The future of the beef herd is dependent on the heifers that are selected as replacements. It is important to keep enough heifers to maintain the desired size of the cow herd.

In the average beef cattle operation there are about 17 percent of the cows culled each year. The reasons vary from old age, low productivity, physical problems, disposition or other problems. Enough heifers must be kept to replace these culled cows.

When considering the selection of replacement heifers, it must first be decided if the cow herd is to be increased, kept the same or decreased. This will influence how much to vary the number of heifers to be kept.

Next a producer should consider the feed supply. If the feed supply is short, then reducing the number of heifers to be kept must be considered.

After the number of heifers needed as replacements are decided, the next step is to evaluate the heifer crop to see how many animals are available as potential replacement. A general rule of thumb is to save approximately 50% more heifers than will be needed. This will allow culling based on growth rate, fertility, disposition or other factors that may influence their desirability as replacements.

As previously stated the number of heifers to save as replacements will vary from one operation to another. Just keep in mind that approximately 50% more heifers should be saved than will be needed as replacements.

For additional information on selecting replacement heifers, contact your local Extension agent.