Selecting Replacement Heifers

Beef cattle producers should use all available information when selecting replacement heifers.

Selecting a replacement heifer by appearance only is very risky. A heifer must be of the acceptable type if she is to be kept as a replacement, however, she must also have the genetic potential to produce a heavy calf. This is the reason that records must also be utilized when making the selection.

All available records should be used to insure that the better heifers are being considered as replacements. Consider using records such as those provided by The Beef Cattle fIRM Record Keeping Program. The heifer with the heaviest weaning weight may or may not be the best replacement heifer. A heavy, fat heifer at weaning is a poor choice as a replacement. The heifer must also be of an acceptable type.

Keep disposition in mind when making heifer selections. Do not save that heifer that escaped the day other heifers went to market. Heifers with bad dispositions create problems as long as they remain in the herd.

Producers should keep in mind the frame size and weight they want their cow herd to be when selecting heifers. The mature weight and size of cow herds will be increased by continually selecting the very biggest heifers. Are the heifers being considered going to make cows that will weight 1300 to 1400 pound cows at maturity? If the cow herd is already about the desired size it may be best to select the heifers with good growth that are about average in size rather that the very largest.

Select those heifers that were born early in the breeding season. The heifers have a better chance of calving as the remainder of the herd. Late calves are generally from those cows that calve late in the calving season. Don’t perpetuate the problem of late calves.
Always select about 50% more heifers that needed to allow for culling of heifers that do not develop properly or do not breed.

Remember, to select the best replacement heifers use all available information instead of using partial information and hoping for the best. For more information on selecting replacement heifers, contact your local Extension agent.