

Timeliness is Key for a Beef Cattle Operation

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When assessing the profitability or success of a beef cattle farm there are many factors that can be considered. Over the last several years it has become readily apparent to me that the difference between an above-average operation and a below-average operation oftentimes is related to timeliness of getting things done. With each passing year it seems as though many of the necessary tasks that need to be completed do not get completed until the last minute, this can spell doom for a beef cattle operation. There are numerous tasks that can be discussed with regard to timeliness but a few of the more important ones will be discussed in this article.

Forage Program. Timeliness is extremely important for a successful forage program. A prime example is the planting of winter annuals. For many areas of the state a September 15th planting date is recommended for winter annuals on a prepared seedbed. The difference between planting on time versus a month late can be quite significant when growing conditions are optimal. The accompanying photos show the difference between a field of ryegrass that was planted on September 15th versus one that was planted a month later. Both photos were taken on November 1st and it is obvious that the first pic-

ture depicting the field planted in October has no accumulated growth; however, the field planted in a timely manner already has accumulated about 10 to 12 inches of standing forage that would equate to about 1500 pounds of forage per acre. Both of these fields have received the same amount of input but at different times – timeliness does matter! The same concept is true for weed control. When weeds are sprayed at the optimal time it requires small rates of herbicide and the effectiveness is extremely good. On the contrary, if spraying occurs a month or two later than the optimal time then much higher rates of the herbicide are needed and the effectiveness decreases appreciably.

Animal Health. Treating a sick animal or assisting with a difficult birth also yields the best results when accomplished in a timely manner. Oftentimes calving assistance is initiated too late to result in a live calf. Likewise, there are many instances where the veterinarian is called after the animal has progressed beyond treatment. If the call had been made much earlier the cow could have been treated with a high degree of success.

Machinery repair. Replacing a faulty bearing when you first observe a problem is much more cost effective than waiting

until the bearing fails. Often times this results in a shaft being bent or some other major problem. Likewise, replacing worn or dry-rotted tires on the stock trailer is much easier now than when it is loaded with cows and sitting in the ditch because of a failed tire.

Planning. The best way to be timely is to have a plan laid out ahead of time. For example, you know that last year you had a severe problem with thistles in one particular pasture. The best plan is to spray early, not wait until the thistles have gotten large and are difficult to kill. The way to be on top of this early is to write “thistles” on your February 2012 calendar right now so that when February rolls around you look for the first warm day and go spray that field with a herbicide and then your thistle problem will be controlled. Waiting until April to take action will result in the same reoccurring problem. Make timeliness be a high priority on your beef cattle operation.

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Pictured in the photo above, the field planted in October has no accumulated growth.



In comparison, the field planted in a timely manner already has accumulated about 10 to 12 inches of standing forage.