

## **Replacement Female Management**

*Eric McPhail*

*Director/Agricultural Agent Gunnison County*

Deciding to develop one's own heifers can be both challenging and expensive. The overall goals of any replacement program should focus on optimizing fertility and breeding rates, while at the same time sustaining breed-backs and longevity for the years to come. To reach these goals, new research is showing that heifers should be developed post-weaning on forage-based and range diets while maintaining a body condition score of 5.5-6. Heifers developed in a feedlot, or those fed for increased average daily gain, are shown to have higher breeding rates and reach puberty a couple weeks faster. However, this not only suppresses their ability to breed back the following year and limits their longevity in the herd; it also has an effect on their daughters to become efficient replacements in the future.

The true key becomes moderation. Heifers need to be fed quality forages and supplemented, as needed, to maintain moderate growth and body condition. Heifers should be fed better than mature cows but not like feedlot cattle. Also, when getting ready for calving season, heifers need to be in optimal condition and don't forget the salt and mineral. Having a calf can be an exhausting ordeal for a new mother and then afterwards they have to have enough strength to get up, turn around, and clean off their baby; all while having produced enough quality colostrum. Therefore, electrolyte balance and sustainable energy are extremely important factors when your heifers are going into the battle of labor and not to mention their ability to breed back quickly.