

Cattle Producer's Handbook

Shortening the Calving Season

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Setting and maintaining a breeding and calving season is one of the first steps toward reproductive management and profitability. The optimum goal should be to maintain a 45- to 60-day calving season to allow sufficient time after calving for all cows to be exhibiting estrous cycles at the beginning of the subsequent breeding season.

Shortening the calving season will improve the reproductive performance of the cowherd. Cows that calve during a short period are obviously bred in a short period. Therefore, late-calving cows with a shorter interval from calving to breeding and fewer heat cycles in which to become pregnant are avoided. Since breeding must begin within 80 days after the first calf is born to maintain a 365-day calving interval, increasing pregnancy rates in late calvers requires planning and often induction of estrous cycles.

A controlled calving season concentrates the time and labor for calving. It can also reduce expenses and increase efficiency through better management of herd health and nutrition, with all cows being in the same stage of production allowing for strategic supplementation and body condition management. In addition, it allows for closer observation of the cowherd during calving and decreased calf mortality.

If producers generally calve over a longer period of time, it is imperative to make the transition to a shorter calving season over several years. Simply reducing the breeding season, followed by pregnancy testing and culling of open cows, can eliminate late calvers but may also eliminate a large portion of the herd. Depending on how long the calving season is, transitioning 15 to 20 percent of the herd per year to a 45-day calving season may be great progress.

In order to maintain a shortened calving season it is important to identify the causative factors of an extended season. The cause must be identified and corrected before

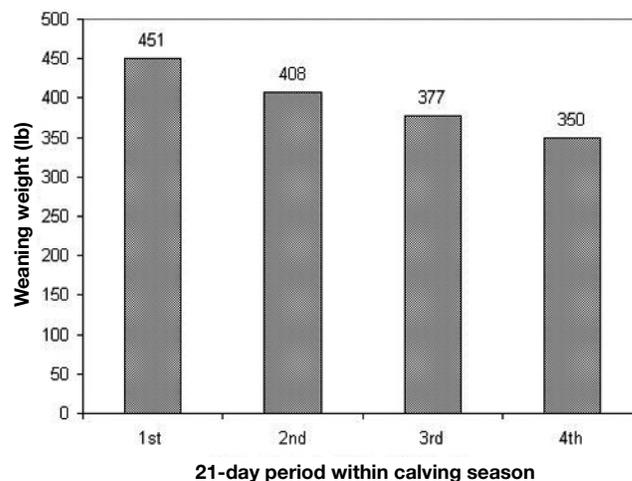


Fig. 1. Weaning weights of Utah steer calves born within the 1st (1-21 days), 2nd (22-42 days), 3rd (43-63 days), or 4th (64-84 days) period in the calving season.

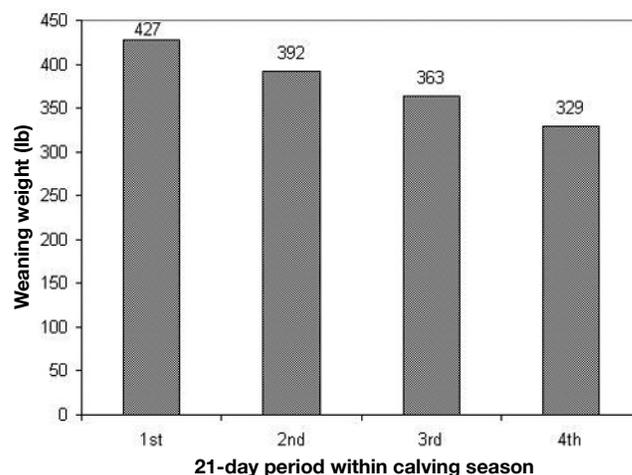


Fig. 2. Weaning weights of Utah heifer calves born within the 1st (1-21 days), 2nd (22-42 days), 3rd (43-63 days), or 4th (64-84 days) period in the calving season.