

Size is Important When Breeding Yearling Heifers

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A goal of many Florida cattlemen is to successfully breed yearling heifers to calve at two years of age, and breed them back to calve again at three years of age. This gives an additional calf in the lifetime of producing females in comparison to breeding heifers first at two years of age. In Florida we have to overcome three major hurdles to accomplish this goal.

First, the tropical grasses used in Florida do not provide the energy needed to obtain the necessary weight gains required of heifers from weaning until they are exposed to bulls at 15 months of age. Second, the breeding season most used in south Florida is from early winter to early spring when the quantity and quality of tropical grass pastures are most limiting. Third, the Brahman genetics needed in cattle production in south Florida produce good, fast growing females that tend to be late maturing, thus slow breeders.

It is difficult to breed yearling heifers and get them rebred after calving under the above conditions. To accomplish this goal heifers require the best pasture available and liberal amounts of supplemental energy and protein. Supplementation must be initiated at weaning and fed through the following breeding season. Heifers then must be fed energy and protein supplement from the time they calve until they are bred back to conceive their second calf. These cows will require special nutrition after dropping their second calf and rebred at three years of age.

Here are some targets to obtain for a successful yearling heifer breeding program. Heifers should weigh 450 (light mature weight cattle) to 500 pounds or more at weaning. Heifers should obtain 65% of their mature weight when exposed to bulls for the first time. For example, Angus heifers should weigh 600 to 650 pounds or more, while Brangus heifers need to weigh 700 to 750 pounds or more when exposed to bulls.

After breeding, heifers should be managed to gain 1.0 to 1.25 pound per day and have a 6.0 or better body condition score at calving. Heifers should maintain the above body weight and condition score until rebred for their second calf.

A yearling heifer breeding program is expensive, but it can be profitable, especially with good feeder calf prices. However, cattlemen must realize that it is a two to three year

program and they must make a commitment to provide good quality pasture and liberal amounts of concentrate supplement to ensure success.

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