

Colorado State University Libraries  
CSU Extension  
Pasture to Profit Podcast  
Transcription of Retaining heifers, episode 58

Item Metadata

Collection: Pasture to Profit Podcast  
Creator: Scott Stinnett, speaker; Travis Taylor, speaker  
Title: Retaining heifers, episode 58  
Date: 2026 October 2  
File Name: AEXT\_P2P\_Ep\_58\_Retaining\_Heifers.mp3  
Transcript Provided By: Adobe Premiere Pro 2026

BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION

00;00;16;16 - 00;00;45;17

Unknown

Welcome to Pasture to Profit. My name is Scott Stinnett, CSU extension specialist here in the Kit Carson County Office serving the Golden Plains area. And with me today again is my colleague Travis Taylor from the Yuma County office of in Wray, Colorado. And Travis, it's weaning time. And with weaning time, it's also maybe time to make some decisions on maybe which heifers producers want to retain to start replacing or rebuilding our cattle herd.

00;00;45;22 - 00;01;20;17

Unknown

Scott, it's that time of year where we're all gathering cattle, and we're making decisions on what we're going to do with them, whether they're going to go to the sale barn, whether we're going to retain ownership. What we're going to do with those females becomes one of them. And for a large number of our cooperators out here who see red heifers selling for \$5,000, they're thinking that maybe I can keep my own replacements and get those cows in a more functional status is they want to expand their beef herds.

00;01;20;17 - 00;01;47;05

Unknown

So thinking about selecting replacement heifers this time of year is something that comes across most of our producers minds. And I think there's some important things in terms of what we need to do to look at and select those replacement heifers, right. So, you know, kind of the good old basic cattlemen days of let's go out and let's we need ten heifers.

00;01;47;05 - 00;02;07;13

Unknown

Let's find our ten biggest fleshy doing girls that are out there. And that's the heifers we're going to replace. But now we've got a lot more information that can be used. And so it's not just go out and find your ten heifers that you've got. So what do we need to be thinking about. What do you need to be thinking about?

00;02;07;14 - 00;02;43;21

Unknown

What tools can they be using to make better selections to build their herd and keep improving their herd? Well, the first thing I think we need to do is let's open up that red book or that calving book that we have, and let's take a look at actually how old these animals are for their size, because we know that age of puberty leads to early conception when we're breeding heifers and those heifers that conceive early tend to stay in our environments longer.

00;02;43;21 - 00;03;15;20

Unknown

And they're probably from genetics and lines of cows that tend to conceive early. So I think opening our red books and saying, wow, start calving in mid-March and I want to be done by April. Why am I keeping that big heifer that grows? Well, at the end of the season? That might be an additional frame size bigger than the rest of mine, because she's a month and a half behind the early carved heifers.

00;03;15;27 - 00;03;36;10

Unknown

She looks good. Maybe mom carved a little closer to green grass, and maybe she just had a little bit of a genetics from our crossbreeding program that show through. Maybe she's not the ideal. So the first thing I do is look for those early born front end heifers that were carved in the front end of our carving season.

00;03;36;10 - 00;04;05;18

Unknown

If our program is working. We're hoping that maybe that gives us 70 or 75% of our heifers to pick through. First of all, so what you're talking about, Travis, is what I used to see in these purebred catalogs, when I'd sometimes be looking for purebred heifers to buy what they call a contemporary groups. You know, these bigger ranches that were, you know, had five, 600 head of cattle to, to look through, you know, they'd take all the calves that were born within a week of each other.

00;04;05;21 - 00;04;28;03

Unknown

And that would make a good contemporary group of 50 to 75 head. How did they compare to the others in the contemporary group? Is that something that you're kind of equating it to? Absolutely. I think that's what we're looking at. You know, those heifers that conceive in the first 21 days of initial breeding season, they cavalier. They have more time postpartum to recover.

00;04;28;05 - 00;04;55;00

Unknown

It's important to get those cattle that have high fertility and breed early, because that is the foundation of our longevity of our cowherd cows that come in bread and stay that way. And kept giving those, particularly first calf heifers in our eastern Colorado environment, maybe an extra 20 to 25 days before we come back and put them in the herd.

00;04;55;02 - 00;05;18;13

Unknown

A late calving first calf heifer is one that's probably going to start falling out of our herd. It's pretty hard to move cattle up in terms of their breeding season. They tend to fall back and out of our breeding season and eventually get to be on that call end of the cowherd. When we make those adjustments like we've done the last few years for dry weather.

00;05;18;13 - 00;05;42;18

Unknown

Scott. So other than being kind of the top end of the group, the the earlier calves that are doing good, that are on time, which gives them more time for breeding as first, first time breeders. What else do we need to really be looking at? What other tools can we work with? Well, I think one of the things we need to talk about this year in terms of selection is we've really got some spotty rains through here.

00;05;42;26 - 00;06;11;14

Unknown

We've had some pastures that have gotten rain, and we've got cows and pastures that don't have rain. And normally those calves probably are going to be different sizes as they're coming in. We need to really look at cattle that are fitting our environment, particularly those heifers in that short grass dry environment that come in and mama still producing well, those cattle are on the upper end of that contemporary group in that pasture.

00;06;11;20 - 00;06;33;01

Unknown

Those would be ones that, hey, maybe I ought to take a look at those, even though they may be 30 or 40 pounds behind the calves that come out of one of those pastures where we have those bottom drawers that caught snow and also caught all the runoff water from the neighbors, and they had green grass all year for mom to milk the whole time.

00;06;33;03 - 00;07;02;25

Unknown

So I think fitting cattle into our environment, we talk about that a lot. But I think on years like we've had this year where it's very spotty and sporadic, trying to bring all those calves to one location or pick heifers out of those pastures, those environmental conditions need to play more into our mind. I know a lot of us want to go out and find that phenotypic, beautiful heifer that we want to put a show halter on and send her to the county fair.

00;07;02;26 - 00;07;33;17

Unknown

But she may be one that's mom's milk. Pretty good. And she's above and beyond some of the heifers that maybe didn't have as functional rainfall this summer that some of our other contemporary groups got right, having a having a good doing mama, but who actually produces a lot of milk and cost us a lot of forage and a lot of energy to raise that big a calf may not be the best fit for our semi-arid, short grass high plains prairie.

00;07;33;19 - 00;08;03;20

Unknown

Yeah, it's very important, like I said, to to make sure that we're kind of keeping some of those things in check. Those cows that milk, heavy heifers from cows that have other issues because they have massive volumes of milk, heifers from cows, they have feet issues, but they raise a big calf, maybe aren't the ones that we need to be selecting to build the next generation of our cowherd.

00;08;03;23 - 00;08;27;21

Unknown

I'm not telling you to go get rid of that big footed cow and color and be. If she's raising you that 650 pound calf or that calf that's 50 pounds above your average, use that cow for what? She's good for making things to sell. And I think when you look at those things that you add in, I think it's important again, to open that red book.

00;08;27;24 - 00;09;06;07

Unknown

Did mama have another scorer that wasn't very good? Does Mom or Dad have a foot score? That's not real good. Does mom tend to breed late and always has a calf, but it seems to be in the back end of our calving season. It's probably not the heifers we want to retain in our environment. Those heifers coming or in our calving season tend to stay almost 10% higher rate than those calves that are coming in our second and third calving period in in our calving sessions.

00;09;06;07 - 00;09;35;05

Unknown

As you look at some of the literature going down the road in terms of research, that's been done just on the age of the calf. Yeah, just the basics of trying to line up breeding if they're on the front end versus the back end. And let's say you have a 60, maybe even a 90 day calving season, that means that those earlier heifers have got a 2 or 3 extra chances at coming into heat and being bred before those younger ones do.

00;09;35;06 - 00;09;58;20

Unknown

And when you're trying to hit the two year mark with a calf, that's going to be pretty important. Yeah, I think it's highly important when we look at that. And the other thing you want to do is kind of we talked about in our episodes talking about cows and treating two year olds a little bit different, those first calf heifers, because they are still growing and going and going.

00;09;58;21 - 00;10;28;12

Unknown

And if our genetics, we're increasing our growth genetics and our herd and we're increasing the milk genetics in our heard, those two year old cows are requiring more. We get into a bottleneck. We sometimes don't pay enough attention to what has got us productively sound and efficient there in our entire operation. So we want to make sure that we keep things like mature cow size and check.

00;10;28;12 - 00;10;55;05

Unknown

We want to make sure that we keep. Maybe the bulls were selecting and milk production in check, and select heifers from those animals that are fitting our environmental skills. On my cowherd, I try to look at that milk EPD, and I try to keep it on bulls eye by between 20 and 30. And that doesn't mean if everything else is right, I don't go outside that balance.

00;10;55;05 - 00;11;40;02

Unknown

But when I'm looking at that, that tends to fit my Eastern Colorado environment. When I'm looking to keep heifers out of those that will reproduce in the next generation, stacking pedigrees for milk or size or just pure growth sometimes gets us into trouble in terms of our city and just outperforming our environment. Right. And I think another thing, maybe some producers are starting to look towards maybe doing more AI work with the cost of bulls, you know, the cost that you can have in doing AI, AI, generational females, females that are out of females that are out of females that are out of females that are AI bread.

00;11;40;06 - 00;12;17;21

Unknown

And a lot of it has to do with their docility as much as their reproductive ability. Keeping in mind which one of those efforts, if you're doing AI, is from a lineage of multiple generations of AI females versus those that are bull bred. Because anecdotally, but also scientifically, we're seeing where, yes, females that are out of multi generation of AI tend to do better in an AI program versus if you've never done a AI and you start breeding everything that's in the herd and they're all boulevard, there can be a pretty significant difference in AI success.

00;12;17;23 - 00;12;40;19

Unknown

Absolutely. So I'm going to just relate it back to my own little herd. One of the first things I look at is, was that heifer born out of my AI program, because I think those are my advanced genetics. So that's kind of where I make my first cut, right? And for me, those because I synchronize and do a time breed, those are on the front end of my calving period.

00;12;40;24 - 00;13;17;08

Unknown

So they're the older heifers. Then after I get past that group of heifers that I like phenotypically or don't call for production purposes, my next group is out of cleanup bulls. And it's very interesting because I use my own bulls back to clean up my cow hurt. Well, I have one bull that I use for several years that I keep looking at, heifers that I've kept, and they've been out of my productive cows, and out of the one bull that I was using to clean up for a series of 3 or 4 years that I had raised.

00;13;17;10 - 00;13;41;07

Unknown

And I've often thought back that, man, I should maybe have used that bull a little bit more, wouldn't have had to use my AI program. But that bull was born, raised, and grew in my environment as well as his mother and that bull that fits in my environment and produces calves that perform well in my environment, out of my better in cows.

00;13;41;10 - 00;14;07;17

Unknown

I think there is a huge environmental effect that it can have because those cows continue to breed and stay in the program. Yeah, I've I've seen that. So I'm going to speak on it from experience. When I worked for a year with a friend of mine on his operation, that was a a tour bred operation that some cows and some calves out of certain bulls did better in our environment.

00;14;07;19 - 00;14;39;04

Unknown

Even though those bulls were supposed to be the trendsetting bulls at the time, they didn't do as well in our current environment that we were in versus other places where those bulls were being used in the AI program. So I think, yeah, trace it back to your bulls as well. And just because something is the trendy bull to use in AI this year, you might consider what environment did they came out of if they came out of good old Midwestern corn Belt, Iowa, Indiana, the eye states there, that's a whole different deal.

00;14;39;04 - 00;15;04;26

Unknown

Then a bullet came out of right here in eastern Colorado, eastern Wyoming, western Nebraska. Yeah. On the flip side of that, a few years ago, I had a set of ten late cabin cows there at the tail end of my calving season. And I'm looking at these cows one day when they're lined up, as I'm checking cows and I look at the tags and because I know the ear tags, I can look back.

00;15;04;27 - 00;15;29;07

Unknown

Eight of the ten all were daughters or granddaughters of a particular late calving, high producing cow that I had. So I kept her daughters because, as we said earlier, she's that high producing cow that keeps it. Well, when the drought year comes and they haven't carved and you have to go to forage, those all wind up going down the road for you.

00;15;29;09 - 00;16;02;15

Unknown

So at least they did for me. So I think it's important to kind of keep an eye on those trends that happen in your operation as well. So when we get out there and selecting the pin this year, take a little bit of time. If you're going to record underscores on mamas, if you're going to record birth dates, if you're going to record sires, let's look at that information and not just leave it sitting in the house, on the desk or in the pickup under the windshield.

00;16;02;15 - 00;16;23;11

Unknown

When we go to select our heifers this year, when we go out and take a look at that pen of heifers, and we're going to keep 40, 30, 50, 60% of them, however you do your program. So use that information and kind of make some cut offs. I'm not going to keep calves that are born after this date.

00;16;23;14 - 00;16;47;29

Unknown

I'm not going to keep calves that are out of cows that have other scores higher than this. Take a little bit of time the night before Preesall. That and I think you can make huge progress with a limited amount of information in your cowherd. Yeah, passing the eye test ought to be the last thing that you're after. You get all the other requirements up front of what you really need to move forward.

00;16;48;02 - 00;17;09;16

Unknown

And then, yeah, we still want things that are in the front pasture that look good to the neighbors when they drive by. Right? But the eye test is kind of the last thing. Yes, I think I think if you're going to keep all this data bottom line for this information, it's let's use it to make selections that move our entire herd down the road.

00;17;09;19 - 00;17;30;10

Unknown

Well, Travis, I think that's a lot of good information today for producers to kind of mull over and think about as they're starting to wean, and they're looking through those weaning pins between now and hopefully some good sale days coming up here this fall. If you have questions about today's topic or have suggestions for any other topics, you can reach out to Travis or I.

00;17;30;11 - 00;18;07;21

Unknown

This is Scott and you can reach me here in the Kit Carson County office at (719)346-5571. Or you can shoot me an email at Scott.Stinnett@colostate.edu. That's colo state.edu. Travis. How do they get ahold of you? Yes. You can get ahold of me in the extension office in Wray Colorado at the courthouse. And I am at Travis.Taylor@colostate.edu or give me a call at (970)332-4151.

00;18;07;24 - 00;18;12;07

Unknown

Thanks again, everybody, for listening. To Pasture to Profit we hope you will tune in next time.

END TRANSCRIPTION