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BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION

00;00;16;22 - 00;00;50;28
Unknown
Welcome to Pasture to Profit. My name is Scott Stinnett. CSU extension specialist here in Kit Carson County in Burlington, Colorado. And again joined by my colleague Travis Taylor, extension specialist for the Golden Plains area in the Wray, Colorado office in Travis. We're getting into calving season here and we're seeing some interesting things. Hearing some anecdotal stuff. And let's talk about gestation length and the fact that some of us think we might be going crazy by what we're seeing, but maybe we're not.

00;00;51;00 - 00;01;15;24
Unknown
You shared an article with me the other day. Had some research in it from Virginia Tech about gestation length. Yes, absolutely. I think this is coming to the forefront because a lot of people are not getting their sync heifers up where they need to have them, and they're having early calves, and calves are coming earlier than they look.

00;01;15;24 - 00;02;03;29
Unknown
So our little ayam Red book, or the old red book that we used to see in the front of it, it's got a 285 day gestation length calendar for beef cattle, and that's that's pretty accurate. There are some breed differences in there, but there's been some more research done over the years. In particular, the study that we were referencing was a Virginia Tech study where they looked at, I believe, 8 or 9 different beef herds over a series of eight years where they knew the exact breeding date and they knew the gestation when those cows carved based on insemination.

00;02;04;01 - 00;02;32;16
Unknown
And those beef cattle ranged from a short gestation period on 10,000 head, the shortest was 253 days to. The longest was 300 days. Now, with some breed differences in there, this is on 10,000 head of cattle. But they came back and said that the average for those beef cattle was about 280 days, which is five days shorter than in your little red book.

00;02;32;18 - 00;03;00;06

Unknown
That being said, we are probably not out of our mind that these calves are coming earlier and earlier every year like kids wish Christmas would. So one of the things I want to point out about this study that you've brought up, it's over 10,000 births. Now, most of research that we see out of a university, the research is much, much smaller when it comes to cattle.

00;03;00;07 - 00;03;29;09
Unknown
You know, we might have had 30 head over five, ten years, but 10,000 births. So this is a lot of data. And the other thing that stuck out to me about this was this cowherd was owned by the Virginia Department of Corrections. So I'm pretty sure this is not a purebred heard. This is probably a commercial hurt. So this is a nice example of a large number in this data set.

00;03;29;15 - 00;03;52;29
Unknown
As well as this is going to be a commercial herd and not some purebred herds. So we're going to have some mixing and mingling. And it is all boss Taurus cattle. There's no boss indicus no hump cattle, no Roman influence. So I think this is a great study just because of some of those main points right there that were 10,000 plus verse, a commercial cowherd that's being managed.

00;03;53;01 - 00;04;22;01
Unknown
Absolutely. I think it adds some validity to the data. Correct. Just based on sheer numbers. But when we we start thinking about this short gestation thing in several breeds and I, I'm particularly res Angus so I'm more familiar with that. So I'll reference that, you know, we've already talked in it. If you look at some of the breed differences in gestation, gestation period for the average Angus cow is about 283 days.

00;04;22;02 - 00;04;47;25
Unknown
Red Angus would be similar to maybe a Charlotte or a semitone, which is 289 to 90. So there's some differences. And of course crossbreeding would have a little bit of both of those in there. So we look at 285 was kind of the standard, but particularly in the Angus breed we've selected for carvings, genetics and those curve vendors we call them that are light birth weight and rapid growth.

00;04;47;25 - 00;05;18;04
Unknown
And we've selected for those calves for a number of years. Those like birth weight calves. But the question then gets raised are we selecting for actual birth weight or were we selecting based on the gestation length and cattle that have a shorter gestation link there? Because on some of the information we can look at from Kansas State University, the calf in the last 60 days puts on about 75% of it.

00;05;18;04 - 00;05;50;17

Unknown
So that's 60 pounds on an 80 pound calf that's put on in the last 60 days. And as we approach calving, those calves are gaining about a pound, probably a day when we look at that. So if we shorten the gestation length, selecting for shorter gestation, we'd also select for calves that probably aren't gaining weight as fast. So that being said, do we truly know what we were actually selecting for by using the simple birth weight of an animal to tell us that they're easier?

00;05;50;17 - 00;06;17;15
Unknown
Kevin. I think that's an important thing for producers to look into their records. And again, we're going to stress good record keeping. If you've got a number of cows and you can see that on the whole and your herd. You're getting shorter gestation lengths, or there's a certain bloodline that gives you some shorter gestational lengths. How does that set up with birth weight?

00;06;17;17 - 00;06;42;27
Unknown
Is there a correlation going on? So if you're a PhD student out there looking for a research project, Travis and I would really like to know, is your birth weight and your and your gestational length, how correlated are those? And yes, with what Travis is saying when we're selecting for lower birth weight, are we also getting a shorter gestational length?

00;06;42;29 - 00;07;07;07
Unknown
Well, Scott, you've helped me on some estrogen synchronization programs, right. And we've some heifers over the last few years. And we keep looking at that. And I'll use the family ranch, for example. We've been AI to light birth weight bulls and we use some Charlotte Angus Seminole bloodlines in the background of those.

00;07;07;09 - 00;07;35;24
Unknown
But breeding to light birth weight Angus bulls. We seem to get heifer heifers calving earlier and earlier. We know that a half year calf usually doesn't go as long in gestation as a bull calf that's coming bulky take a little bit longer to cook than a heifer, so to speak. But when we look at that in those AI dates, our family experiences, we need to be looking to get those up.

00;07;35;24 - 00;08;01;05
Unknown
Because even on heifer sync on the same day, we'll get a three week or maybe even more these days. Distribution in those calves that were all AI on that same date. So there's lots of factors that can affect when a cat comes, whether we've always heard the old deal, if you get a low pressure system that cows are going to kick it out.

00;08;01;07 - 00;08;29;29
Unknown

It might be nutritional factors that play into effect. So there's lots of things there that affect the weight of a calf and affect a birth weight. But if we start truly believing in genetics and we stack these continual carving pedigrees on top of each other, it becomes, are we getting lighter birth weight calves or we shorten shortening the gestation length?

00;08;30;00 - 00;09;04;11
Unknown
And then what effect does that have on the future of that cap as we go forward? And along with that, we're thinking about on the back side, the profitability side here, when we're selling calves, we would like to see very uniform in age and size of our calves. But if some are coming right now, if they're now really we need to move the average to 280 days instead of 285 or 283 that we used to use, as we jokingly say, when we were in college in the 1900s.

00;09;04;13 - 00;09;31;04
Unknown
But yeah, what is that doing to our bottom line when we're going to market, if we don't have if we're a producer that doesn't have a large number of calves, if we're, you know, the producer that's got 50, 60 calves a year to market and we've got calves coming 5 to 10 days early compared to when we would expect, are they coming in smaller.

00;09;31;04 - 00;10;01;11
Unknown
And then they're going to finish at the same weight as everybody else who quote unquote, carved on time was born on time, full gestational length? Or are we going to have some that yeah, they're hitting the ground 5 to 10 days early than we expected, but they're still weighing 80 pounds. And so we're going to have a little different set of calves, not quite as uniform because we've got some 5 to 10 days early.

00;10;01;17 - 00;10;23;19
Unknown
We're always going to have a few late. So we may have a 15 day window in there, a two week window of differences in calves. That all came off the same. If we're using AI, the same AI date if we're using bulls. And so you're a little bit more flexible in, you know, maybe you synced everybody and then turn the bull out.

00;10;23;22 - 00;10;59;07
Unknown
You know, they could still be, you know, add 2 or 3 days difference in their when they were being serviced, those cows and those heifers were being serviced. And then add the other of different dates of calving, different gestation lengths. We can have quite a bit of variation within our calf crop for marketing. Absolutely. When you think that the average calf, when we kind of look at it, is somewhere between two and a half and 2.75 pounds a day, average over that weight per day of age at a 205 day weight.

00;10;59;10 - 00;11;26;12

Unknown
Those calves coming in that you get a calf that's ten days earlier in gestation, even though it's a lighter calf, that calf still going to gain probably two and a half pounds a day to make it simple. So that's 25 pounds difference on that front end. Then your late calf that's now instead of just 21 days behind, we're 31 days behind.

00;11;26;15 - 00;12;06;15
Unknown
So we're going to spread those calves out over 75 pounds where they would have been in a 50 pound group. So yes, those things all play into producing a uniform. The genetics are the same, but producing a uniform calf crop in terms of weight ranges. When we go to market those gas, and when it comes down to those producers who use local sale barns to market their calves, where when you get them to the sale barn, you unload them, then the sale barn will sort them into what they consider sellable groups.

00;12;06;18 - 00;12;42;25
Unknown
50 pounds may keep those groups together. You know, if you brought in 100 calves, that may sell off into less groups, if you're within 50 pounds versus if you're at 75 pounds, they may bust them into more groups of smaller numbers. And yes, that can kind of affect sometimes the overall total price you get this year, being kind of the anomaly in prices, where we saw sometimes the total price paid for lighter weight calves being higher than the total cost paid for heavier caps.

00;12;42;25 - 00;13;18;14
Unknown
So 400 weight calves versus 600 weight calves. We saw 400 weight calves, bringing 50 to $100 more per head than six weight calves, which normally is would not happen, but with the way the market's been running. So yeah, same kind of deal here. If you're trying to market everything at 400 pounds and on your bottom end you may have some 400 pounders, you may have some that are upper end of five pushing six with this greater range in gestational length.

00;13;18;16 - 00;13;55;02
Unknown
I think that's one of the factors we have economically. Right. The other factor we have is how does it affect hell. Right. Because is that calf developing in utero if that calf comes out a few days early, is the lung capacity going to be the same? Is the heart going to be functioning correctly? Do all those things factor and they may factor pretty uniform on 60 and 80 pound calves, but they may not have the same effect when those calves get to.

00;13;55;03 - 00;14;20;13
Unknown
As you and I were talking today, we talked with a feedlot guy that's marketing 16 1,700 pound fat cattle. So what is the long term health effects of a of a shorter gestation time? We know in humans when they're premature, some of those things don't quite develop the way they should.

Or we can have complications in a calf if we're getting one on the early end.

00;14;20;15 - 00;14;41;21
Unknown
Are we truly doing that? So again, I think it gets back that sometimes we can be our own worst enemies when we're selecting for genetics and we're picking out bulls and we start, we know that too much growth can be bad. We know that too little growth doesn't pay. We know that two big calves aren't good, but our two little cows.

00;14;41;23 - 00;15;19;18
Unknown
I think when you start trying to select or single trait select, as we said, I think these are things that producers should think about and what the long term ramifications are. Because if I have a short gestation heifer and I keep those heifers out of my AI program on those heifers, which should be our newest genetics. Am I then compounding it when I breed her back to bull and then another generation on top of those and three generations in how am I impacting the total performance and health if I'm selecting for this calving ease trait?

00;15;19;20 - 00;15;41;03
Unknown
Well, I think it's a lot to ponder. And again, if you're that PhD candidate student out there, I think we have a project for you. We would love to. We'd love to see some research on. But to kind of wrap this up again, we're seeing research out of this Virginia Tech study. So if you're one of these people that thinks this is something is wrong, I'm having some calves way too early.

00;15;41;10 - 00;16;08;29
Unknown
There may be just genetically, there may be a shift in what we need to use for a gestational link for cows. We've gone from 285 down to 283. Maybe we need to move on down to 280 soon. And that may come up with, let's put it this way, people that have more influence on what is considered normal than you and I do, but producers shouldn't be surprised to find shorter gestational calves.

00;16;08;29 - 00;16;38;19
Unknown
We've got some great data from this research study on that, and just understand that there could be some impacts on your calf crop and what you're going to have to market. Yeah. For our producers out there, if you looked at the date you brought them and you look in your Redbook and you find that date. Don't be surprised if you drive out there two weeks ahead of time and you got calves on the ground, so make sure you got them where they need to be before they start calving.

00;16;38;19 - 00;17;05;09
Unknown
It's been a wonderful season in the High Plains to camp, and I think this year it wasn't such a deal, but cold weather we can have. You kind of

want them where they need to be at least three, maybe four weeks before you really get to calving those first calf heifers out of these light weight, birth weight, early gestation type bulls that we're seeing in these breeding programs.

00;17;05;12 - 00;17;43;22
Unknown
Well, great conversation today, Travis. I think some things to ponder for producers. Again, this is pasture to profit. My name is Scott Stinnett, CSU extension specialist here in Burlington, Colorado. If you have questions on today's topic or suggestions for other topics for us to discuss, feel free to contact me in the office. You can call me at (719)346-5571, or you can send me an email at my office at Scott.Stinnett@colostate.edu and Travis.

00;17;43;22 - 00;18;08;02
Unknown
They need to get hold of you. How do they do that? Yes. I have the same Colorado State email. It's Travis.Taylor@colostate.edu, or my phone number at the office is (970)332-4151. Again thanks for listening to Pasture to Profit Podcast. We hope you will tune in next time.

END TRANSCRIPTION