

Management Strategies for Adding Value to Replacement Beef Heifers: A Working Model

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KEYWORDS

• Beef heifer • Heifer development • Show-Me-Select Replacement Heifer Program

KEY POINTS

- Coordinated on-farm beef heifer development and marketing programs are designed to improve reproductive efficiency of beef herds and increase herd profitability.
- These programs expand working relationships among beef producers, extension specialists, and veterinarians to enhance information exchange and improve management of cow herds.
- Beef heifer development programs are improved through a Total Quality Management approach.
- Marketing opportunities for beef heifers that are developed according to established guidelines offer the potential to add value to heifers offered for sale.
- Over time, these programs are recognized for offering reliable sources of quality replacement beef heifers based on genetics and management.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of coordinated regional (Bourbon County Kentucky Elite Heifer Program) or statewide on-farm beef heifer development and marketing programs (Missouri Show-Me-Select Replacement Heifer Program and Sales) that focus on the collective management practices and procedures presented in this issue remove much of the risk of developing replacement beef heifers in comparison with situations whereby replacements are raised or purchased without these criteria being taken into consideration.^{1–4}

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Marketing heifers that are developed according to established guidelines, as in the Bourbon County Kentucky Elite Heifer Program (<http://www.eliteheifer.com/>) and the Missouri Show-Me-Select Replacement Heifer Program (<http://agebb.missouri.edu/select/>), are a viable means of rural economic development in the United States.⁴ These programs are designed to: (1) improve reproductive outcomes resulting from heifer development programs through a total quality management approach; (2) increase marketing opportunities for, and add value to, the heifer portion of the calf crop; and (3) provide reliable sources of quality replacement females concerning genetics and management.

These programs require compliance with specific guidelines, and provisions for various management and reproductive practices and (or) procedures. The guidelines include provisions for ownership; health and vaccination schedules; parasite control; implant use; weight, pelvic measurement, and reproductive tract score; estrous synchronization and artificial insemination; service-sire requirements for birth-weight expected progeny difference (EPD) or calving-ease EPD; early pregnancy diagnosis and fetal aging; and body condition score.^{3,4}

The Missouri Show-Me-Select Replacement Heifer Program was designed to improve reproductive efficiency of beef herds and increase herd profitability. The program was developed for beef producers in Missouri that are involved with the production and sale of beef cattle, and is dependent on active participation from University of Missouri Extension Regional Livestock Specialists and local veterinarians, each of which are critical components of the livestock sector of the state. The pilot effort of the Show-Me-Select Replacement Heifer Program began in 2 regions of Missouri in the fall of 1996, and involved 33 farms and 1873 heifers. Eldon Cole and Al Kennett, University of Missouri Extension Regional Livestock specialists in the southwest and northeast regions, respectively, led these pilot efforts. Since that time the program has grown statewide.

The Show-Me-Select Replacement Heifer Program draws on the fundamental basis on which Extension and the Land Grant System were founded: the use and application of what we know to create knowledge. Data collection is part of the delivery process, and reinforces the development of sound management practices on individual farms regardless of their size. Producers, along with their veterinarians and extension specialists, analyze data generated on their own farms to make decisions based on data collected from their herds. Dr Richard Randle developed the initial database for the program, and more recently funding from University of Missouri Extension was used to enhance the existing database to allow for more complete data capture and expanded use of data for research purposes. This use of data will be important in the long-term success and sustainability of the program.

Organization of the program depends in large part on University of Missouri Extension Regional Livestock Specialists, who serve as coordinators of the program locally and who work closely with veterinarians involved with the program statewide. State Extension Specialists from the University of Missouri provide program support to extension field staff and participating veterinarians. The reproductive goals for heifers enrolled in the program are aimed at improving the breeding performance of heifers during the first breeding period, minimizing the incidence and severity of dystocia at calving with the resulting delivery of healthy vigorous calves, and successful rebreeding of females during subsequent breeding seasons.

Outcomes from the program have met and, in many cases, exceeded the original program objectives, and include: (1) increased adoption by farmers in Missouri of management practices that offer potential to improve long-term reproductive efficiency of their herds and resulting profitability; (2) expanded working relationships

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