

Raising and Marketing Heifers As Replacements

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Williamson Cattle Company retains around 60% of its annual heifer calf crop as potential replacements. Our method of replacement heifer development differs somewhat from other ranches because we utilize owned and leased land in west-central Alabama to grow out these heifers from weaning through breeding. The basic reasons for raising our own replacement heifers are:

- (1 Dependable supply of quality and uniformity
- (2 Set breeding/calving seasons
- (3 Breed selection and degree of Brahman influence
- (4 Selection pressure (fertility, early maturity)
- (5 Control genetics, EPDs thru bull selection
- (6 Control cost

In September we select and wean the top end of our heifers. The remaining 40% are sold as feeders on contracts negotiated earlier. The potential replacements are vaccinated, dewormed and shipped to Alabama. They are grazed on fescue/clover pastures with supplemental feed to insure adequate gain. These pastures are extremely strong nutritionally September-November and March-June. The heifers are in Alabama approximately 10 months from September 15 through July 15 and will gain around 350 lb which is an average of 1.2 lb/day. Our average target weight at breeding (Feb. 6) is 700 lb. In December they are re-vaccinated approximately six weeks prior to breeding. We expose these heifers for breeding on February 6 through June 6 to calve from November 15 through March 15. Around June 1 we will

pregnancy check and sort the detectably bred heifers. Our pregnancy rate on this early bred group will run about 70%. It is a conscious decision not to push these heifers prior to and during the first 60 days of breeding. This is a way to use nutrition as a selection tool for fertility. We will select our replacement heifers from this group and market the rest as early bred heifers. At the end of July we will pregnancy check the remainder of the heifers and detect another 20% as spring bred heifers. The open heifers (10% of the total) will be shipped to a feedlot and fed for slaughter. After breeding we are careful to keep the heifers growing at a good rate and not to get them too fat. Dystocia is often a result of excessive protein the last trimester of pregnancy. By using low birth EPD bulls and limiting protein intake we experience less than 1 % assisted births. The selection pressure we place on these potential replacements insures us that we will retain the top 10-15% for our own replacements. It also insures a buyer of our replacements that they will receive a heifer selected from the top 50% of our entire heifer calf crop.

Marketing replacement quality heifers is an ever changing game. Buyers in Florida prefer a Fall calving heifer and will pay a premium of as much as \$150 per head over a spring calving heifer. In general, buyers in Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee and Kentucky prefer a Spring calving heifer. We sell some heifers in replacement sales. The commissions range from 3-7%. This is a good way to market small groups of heifers. However high commissions (> 4%) can eat up most of the profit. Many repeat and volume buyers will buy from us on a private treaty contract. This allows them to specify certain details such as breed dates, delivery and bull breed. It is my observation that the replacement heifer market will lag one year behind a rising feeder calf market and fall with the

feeder calf market. As a result the replacement heifer market will be one year longer on the downside and one year shorter on the upside. Raising and marketing heifers as replacements can be profitable in most years if you have large

enough numbers to justify such a program. If our base herd was <500 head, I would consider buying replacement heifers from an outside source.

Vaccination Program

Baby Calf	2 Months	January 15	Viral, Blackleg
Calves	5 Months	April 15	2 nd Viral, Brucellosis, Implant
Weaning	10 Months	September 15	Viral, Tric., Lepto., Vibrio, Deworm
Pre-Breeding	13 Months	December 15	Tric., Lepto., Vibrio., Deworm

Expenses

Heifer	600 lb X .80	\$480.00
Hauling	640 Miles X \$2.00/Mile/82 Head	15.61
Feed	\$100/Ton @ 5#/Head/Day X 90 Days	22.50
Hay	1 Bale @ \$25	25.00
Lease	2.5 Acres/Head X \$30/Acre	75.00
Fertilizer	\$30/Acre/2 X 2.5 Acres/Head	37.50
Bulls	\$3500-\$700=\$2800/5 Years/35 Head	16.00
Labor		25.00
Mineral		5.00
Vet/Med		10.00
Misc.		10.00
Total		\$721.61

These are average basic costs for all exposed heifers. Selling the 10% open heifers @ \$500 (900 lb X \$.56/lb) brings the cost per bred heifer to over \$745 in Alabama.

NOTES: