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Determining Pregnancy Status of Beef Cattle
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Determining the pregnancy status of beef cattle continues to be one of the most underutilized yet relatively easy to implement management practices available to beef producers. Results from the 2007-08 National Animal Health Monitoring System Beef Study indicated that approximately 18% of cow-calf operations utilized palpation as a tool for diagnosing pregnancy status. The conditions we are experiencing in 2012 warrant a significant increase in the number of producers using this time-tested practice.

The most obvious reason for pregnancy checking is to identify non-pregnant or open females for sale as a means to reduce feed expenses. The relatively inexpensive cost of a pregnancy check of $5-$10 can lead to major savings in feed costs given the recent escalation in grain prices and other feedstuffs. A significant feed bill can accumulate in the time it would take for an open female to become pregnant, calve, and wean a calf before it can be sold to cover expenses. It would have to be a very "special" open female to justify keeping her around to calve at a much later date.

There are other advantages for determining pregnancy status of the female. It can allow the producer to estimate age of fetus at time of examination to help determine calving date.

Determining pregnancy rates may also provide an indication of problems in a herd which can possibly be corrected earlier. Some of these problems may include poor bull fertility, poor body condition of females (4 BCS or less), poor forage quality and/or quantity, reproductive diseases, environmental stress, and other issues.

Today, there are three basic technologies available to the producer for pregnancy checking: traditional palpation, ultrasound, and blood testing. These technologies are addressed in the following YouTube video covering the topic of "Determining Pregnancy Status of Beef Cattle" that is posted in the OSU Extension Beef Team's YouTube Channel.