Western Canadian Cow-Calf Survey II

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Overview

• About WCCCS
• Respondent Demographics
• Survey results – production indicators, practices
• Reasons for non-adoptoin of RMPs (recommended management practices)
About WCCCS

• Built off of surveys from 80s & late 90s in AB

• Collaboration between 12 groups from BC to MB → provincial ministries of ag, producer associations, research organizations

• First WCCCS in 2014 → 2017 was follow-up survey

• Similar surveys in ON & Atlantic Canada in 2017
WCCCSII Survey Details

• 49 Q’s → 45-60 min to complete
• Qs from 2016 Breeding to 2017 Calf Crop
• Ran November 2017 to end of February 2018
• Compensation → Up to $50 in gift cards
WCCCS Background

• Maintain an updated set of production benchmarks for the western Canadian cow-calf industry
• Historical comparison → how has industry changed
• Guide extension and research efforts
• NEW – Obtain insight into why certain Recommended Management Practices (RMPs) are not adopted
Respondent Demographics
## WCCCS Survey Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WCCCS</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>AB</th>
<th>SASK</th>
<th>MB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Responses</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Respondent</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years Experience</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females Calved</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Responses by Province

- **BC**: 5.5% of National Beef Cow Herd
- **AB**: 41% of National Beef Cow Herd
- **SASK**: 28% of National Beef Cow Herd
- **MB**: 12% of National Beef Cow Herd
- **WCCCS**: 7% of National Beef Cow Herd
Gift Card Issuance

- 253 producers eligible to receive 411 gift cards
- 158 provided completed COP section

Co-op, 35%  
Peavey Mart, 47%  
UFA, 13%
Demographics

Age structure diagram for all decision makers
Demographics

• 25% of respondents reported more than one decision maker
• 63% had post-secondary education
• 43% of primary decision maker #1 work off-farm
  • 61% of primary decision maker #2
• 67% were commercial operations
  • 30% reported having both commercial & purebred herds
Who do you ranch/farm with?

- Spouse, 74%
- Children, 20%
- Parents, 22%
- Siblings, 9%
- Grandparents, 1.95%
- Other, 8%
- Solo, 8%

*Other: cousin, in-laws, uncle, grandchildren, employees, neighbour*
Ranch/Farm Goals  n=247

1. Be profitable (24%)
2. Be happy (21%)
3. Support my family (13%)
4. Pass farm on to next generation (13%)
5. Make a living (13%)
6. Pay down debt (6%)
7. Retire (3%)
8. Break-even (2%)
Production Indicators, etc..
## Reproduction Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cow:Bull Ratio</td>
<td>24:1</td>
<td>22:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breeding Season, days</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% w 63 d or less</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Bred heifers earlier</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg # Days earlier</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Rate (Cows)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Rate (Heifers)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 2016 Breeding Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy Check Cows</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy Check Heifers</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semen Test</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artificial Insemination</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estrus Synchronization</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2017 SK Calf Crop

- 5.1% Average Calf Death Loss (↓ from 7% in 2014)
- 1.2% Abortion Rate
- 85% Calf Crop (Calves Weaned/Females Exposed)
- 57% use polled genetics
- Pain control used by 24% for dehorning & 28% for castration → primarily analgesic (e.g. Meloxicam)
- 27% implanted calves
- 49% abrupt wean
  - 34% fenceline wean, 11% two-stage wean
2017 Calf Marketing

• 84% sold calves at weaning
  • 60% sold more than 50% of their calves at weaning
• 27% preconditioned calves 30-60d
• 47% retained calves to background or finish
• 80% weaned calves sold via live auction
• 11% of weaned calves sold via video auction
• 31% had WLPIP policy in 2017
RMP Adoption
Recommended Management Practices (RMPs)

1. 63 day breeding season for cows.
2. Breed heifers at least 14 d earlier than cows.
3. Pregnancy check cows and heifers.
4. Perform breeding soundness evaluation on bulls.
5. Test feed and water for quality.
7. Utilize extensive/field feeding.
8. Have a herd health program.
Top Reason for >63 d breeding season

- Other farming activities: 29%
- Community Pasture: 26%
- Lack of labour: 24%
- Lack of pasture/facilities: 8%
- Did not answer question: 6%
- Not aware of RMP: 4%
- Happy with conception rate: 3%

n=156
Top Reason heifers not bred before COWS

- Other farming activities: 35%
- Did not answer question: 26%
- Lack of labour/don’t want to extend calving season: 14%
- Same breeding field as cows: 11%
- Not aware of RMP: 8%
- Happy with heifer performance: 6%

n=152
Top Reason for NOT pregnancy checking

- Sell opens in spring when prices higher: 30.69%
- I can tell which are open: 29.70%
- Other reason: 15.84%
- Too expensive/financial benefit too low: 10.89%
- Other farming activities: 5.94%
- Lack labour: 2.97%
- Lack facilities: 1.98%

n=101
Pregnancy Testing – Other Reasons

• I know when the cows are pregnant, with the heifers I am afraid they will abort from that handling.

• This is my parents operation. 2017 we preg tested for the first time on the heifers. My dad could read cattle like a book.

• Always sold opens after calving, fall 2017 first time preg checked and will continue in the future

• Heifers are Checked. Cows are less than 2% open

• We preg check cows that are deemed higher risk of being open, roughly 1/3 of the cows.

• open rate low enough not to warrant hassle
Pregnancy Testing – Other Reasons

• observe mounting, sell all opens as ground beef
• vets are not that accurate/vets are sometimes wrong/pregnancy checking has been inaccurate
• Tail paint, and bulling beacons.
• We have a purebred herd so we're not going to sell the opens anyway.
• combination of expense, lack of time and labour
• Open cows/heifers very rare have prolonged breeding period on purpose so "late calvers" are culled with benefit of having raised a calf
• Being open is not a major criteria to be culled
Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence

Top Reason for NOT semen testing

- Happy w my conception rate; no need to test bulls: 73%
- Other reason: 15%
- Lack facilities: 4%
- Lack labour: 3%
- Too expensive/financial benefit too low: 3%
- Other farming activities: 1%

n=73
Semen Testing – Other Reasons

- Expensive
- Pain hauling bulls to town for the test
- Lease or rent bulls
- Once had conflicting test results
- Raise my own bulls/closed herd
- Calving rate high enough
- Run multi-sire pastures, only test if we have concern
- No problem or concern to warrant testing
Top Reason for NOT Implanting Calves

• Of 259 respondents, **73% (190)** did not implant their calves

- **Philosophically opposed**: 34%
- **Other**: 19%
- **Too expensive/financial benefit**: 17%
- **Lack of labour/know-how**: 16%
- **Market my calves natural**: 10%
- **Better price for non-implanted**: 5%

n=188
Implanting Calves – Other Reasons

- I'm opposed but I also think we grow big enough calves we don't need the extra boost.
- marketing flexibility
- Do not find that implants are necessary with our genetics / believe that good genetics in cows and bulls will make up for implant gain
- Purebreds animals retained for seedstock
- Lazy I guess. Can't be bothered to bring calves in from pasture, then sort and implant.
- I don't need to and most buyers won't buy if implanted
Implanting Calves – Other Reasons

• I worked at a feedlot and do not believe it gives me enough bang for the buck
• We raise everything as "natural" grassfed beef
• Don't handle at appropriate age to implant
• Consumers do not want them
• Not quite convinced right thing
• Give calves a 210 day implant at weaning
Feed & Water Testing

- 60% lab test feed for quality
  - 95% then use the results to develop a ration
  - Top Reason for NOT testing: Cattle seem healthy, so I see no need to test (62%)
- ~60% DO NOT lab test water
  - 44% have dugouts for one of their water sources
  - #1 Reason: Cattle seem healthy, so I see no need to test.
  - #2 Reason: We drink from same source, so it must be ok.
Top Reasons for NOT extensive/field feeding

1. Concerned about wasted feed.
2. Concerned about reducing animal performance.
3. No winter watering system.
4. Too cold/Too much snow/Start calving in winter
5. Concerned about animal health & welfare
5. Wildlife eat/wreck the feed
5. Lack an accessible site that is fenced
Vaccination

• 95% vaccinate (UP SLIGHTLY from 92% in 2014)

In last 12 months, which diseases were vaccinated for?

- Anthrax
- Vibrio
- Scours
- Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD)
- Reproductive Diseases
- 7, 8, or 9 way for Closoidal disease

n=243

Cows Calves
Technology Adoption

- Squeeze chute: 96%
- Electric fence: 94%
- Weigh scale: 59%
- Electronic records: 49%
- Solar/Wind Watering System: 37%
- RFID reader: 34%
- DNA testing: 29%
- Remote Water Monitoring: 13%
- Drones: 7%
- GrowSafe: 2%

n=243
In Closing

• Remember the profit ↔ production link
• Effort underway to combine all the 2017 survey results into one larger pan-Canadian report
• Further analysis will be released in late June
• National Beef Strategy → Productivity Pillar → increase production efficiency 15% by 2020
• Increased adoption of RMPs & existing technologies can help industry reach this target
Acknowledgement

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Acknowledgement

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Any Questions?

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