

IF AI IS SO GOOD, WHY ARE WE CHALLENGED WITH ITS USE IN COMMERCIAL BEEF OPERATIONS?

Ivan G. Rush, Professor Emeritus,
University of Nebraska

AI in Beef Herds

- NAHMS estimate less than 10%
 - Used heavily in dairy and beef seedstock
 - Considerable use in yearling heifers and herds that are using in conjunction with other goals – progeny testing, special production – own bulls, niche markets etc
- Many new innovations that provide better tools

Data verse Field Use or Research verse Real World

- Johnson et al. KSU
 - Showed MGA/Prost + AI had \$2.88 cwt less breeding cost than natural service for 500 calf
- Anderson and Denton - Un of Kent
 - Showed \$70 more profit per calf utilizing sync + AI verse calves from natural service
- Whole systems analysis has shown more benefits

So why not more use?

Labor

- Lack of quantity
 - Goals have been expressed to have one person care for 800-1000 cows
 - If one and ½ person cares for 500 cows works 6 - 10 hr days that equals 9 hrs/cow for daily care, haying, fencing etc

Labor

- Lack of Quality – hired or self
 - Highly skilled – heat checking, quite handling, techniques with protocol and products and actual insemination
 - AI skills may only be needed 5-60 days in a year
- Who trains and what are they worth?

Labor

- AI crews
 - Usually highly skilled
 - Seasonal

Market Incentive

- Do we get paid for improved genetics?
 - Many cattle sold on averages – lack of market incentive

Expansive Operations

- Many large commercial cows herds are in expansive operations where confining cows is a challenge.
 - Not only large operations but often miles apart
 - Can be managed such as close in pastures, irrigated pasture or drylot

Superior Genetics Offered by Seedstock Producers

- Most use AI and superior bulls
- More tools available
 - Stacked pedigrees
 - EPD's, markers, ultrasound, scrotal measurements, feed efficiency, actual measurements
- Top bulls should produce as good as AI bulls with few or any progeny

Fear of a wreck

- “Do you hear of Joe’s AI wreck?”
 - Usually explained but often not told
- “Since I started AI ing my cows are all messed up”
 - Some calve one or two cycles late
 - Some blame products used in sync programs

Does AI Fit Quality of Life on Ranch?

- “I just want to be profitable enough to stay horse back the rest of my life”
- Intensive AI programs that require long prolonged days do not suit some

Small Operations

- Cattle are not a livelihood and lack of incentive
- Fixed costs can be very high for 25 cows

Lack of Facilities

- “Anything that is easy to do will more likely get done” – Jim Roberts
- Getting cattle in, held, sorted, and then restraint for the insemination
 - “Once I corral them once it is heck to get them in the following week” Why?

Commitment

- “It takes a great deal of commitment on everyone's part to have a successful AI program” – Connee Quinn, rancher SD
- Other thoughts
 - Will later calving limit AI use
 - What impact will accurate and economical markers play?

What Can Be Done to Get Higher Use?

- Lower labor requirements with high success rate
 - Continue to develop economical and practical tools for timed AI
- Improve sexed semen quality and lowered costs
- Education on the value and marketing superior genetics

- Build it and they will come?
- Make it economical and it will get utilized