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Spike Feeding Heifers and Breeders

Spike feeding is used to achieve greater pregnancy rates, fewer breeder mortalities, increased weaning percentages and potential increased weaning weights. Molasses based supplements such as Molafos are an effective choice when implementing a spike feeding program.

Managing Body Condition Score

The single most important factor influencing fertility in Maiden Heifers and Breeders is body condition score. Breeding cattle should be maintained with a minimum body condition score of 3 where possible. This can be achieved by minimising weight loss in the late dry season and/or by maximising weight gain during the wet season.

Dry season body condition is affected by:

- Seasonal calving to avoid dry season lactations where possible.
- Strategic weaning to reduce the nutritional stress on the cow.
- Nutritional management and supplementation of the breeders, through the strategic use of Urea based licks, Phosphorus, and spike feeding.

Wet season body condition is affected by:

- Nutritional management of breeders, specifically correcting any Phosphorus deficiency during this high growth phase.
- Body condition carried over from the dry season.

The best return on investment when feeding breeding cows is to manage body condition score during late pregnancy. Feeding at this time ensures that the maximum effect on live weight gain is achieved. Feeding breeders after calving results in a much lower response in body condition change. This is because this extra feed is portioned to milk production and results in increased weaner weights. While it is not a bad thing to have heavier weaners, strategic weaner management and nutrition can compensate for lighter weaning weights.

Body condition should be “spiked” during the late dry season to reduce the effects of anoestrus and ensure adequate and viable egg production before condition is lost through lactational stresses.

Guidelines for Spike Feeding

Spike feeds must be high in energy and protein to be most effective. Heifers and cows will need to consume between:

- 6-10 grams of molasses based spike feed per kilogram of live weight per head per day, or
- 3-5 grams of protein meal based spike feed per kilogram of live weight per head per day.

Molasses based supplements should contain Urea and protein meal and should be fed daily or every second day to ensure consistent and efficient utilisation. Protein meals or fuzzy cotton

seed can be fed twice weekly with little negative effect on efficiency.

Depending on the starting body condition of the breeders, to be effective spike feeding generally needs to add around 1 condition score. To realistically achieve this the duration of feeding will be around 60 days.

If implemented correctly a spike feeding program should result in greater pregnancy rates, fewer breeder mortalities, increased weaning percentages and potential increased weaning weights. Calving pattern will also be improved with fewer cows carrying a calf into the dry season due to late conception precipitated by lactational anoestrus.

The major economic response to spike feeding is achieved with maiden heifers. It allows these heifers to rebound from the initial pregnancy and suffer less when they enter the commonly defined “problem group” of first calf heifers.

For further information on spike feeding using Molafos molasses-based supplements, please contact your local Molafos distributor.