

OSU EXTENSION

Cow age and cow productivity (When is she too old?)

Strong cattle prices have encourage ranchers to keep any cow that might have a live calf to sell at the next weaning period. If rainfall allows forage growth to be adequate, keeping an older cow to have another calf to wean next year is tempting.

At cow culling time, producers often face some tough decisions. Optimum culling of the herd often seems to require a sharp crystal ball that could see into the future. Is she good for another year? Will she keep enough body condition through the winter to rebreed next year? Is her mouth sound so that she can harvest forage and be nutritionally strong enough to reproduce and raise a big calf? At what age do cows usually start to become less productive?

There is great variability in the longevity of beef cows. Breed may have some influence. Region of the country and soil type may affect how long the teeth remain sound and allow the cow to consume roughages such as pasture and hay.

Records kept by a very large ranch in Florida in the 1980's and published in the 33rd Annual Proceedings of the



**DAVID
CANTRELL**

Beef Cattle Short Course by the University of Florida Animal Science Department show how productivity changes over the life of the beef cows. These large data sets were collected on 19,500 cows in 1983 and 14,000 cows in 1982. These cows were not pampered but expected to produce in the environment in which they were kept.

This data would indicate that cows are consistent in the rebreeding performance through about 8 years of age. A small decline was noted in 1983 as cows aged from 8 to 10 years of age. However the most consistent decline in reproductive performance was noted after cows were 10 years of age. A steeper decline in reproductive performance was found as they became 12 years of age. This data, collected in Florida on cows with some Brahman influence, represents one of, if not the largest data set on this subject. (Source: Genho, 1984 Proceedings of the Beef Cattle Short Course. Animal Science Department, University of Florida.)

David Cantrell is the Agriculture Educator for the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service in Pittsburg County. He can be contacted at 918-423-4120.