Summertime Cowherd Profit Tips
*Too cull or not to cull? That is the question!*  
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Week after week we see and hear about the strong cattle market. This entices us to want to increase our herd size to ultimately increase our profit potential. However, the problem that we run into is the current cost and availability of replacements. Heifer replacements, bred cows, and open cows have become very valuable and limited in supply.

One way producers are avoiding the cost of purchasing replacements is to become less strict in their culling practices. As you have seen me write before, there are four groups of cows we recommend you should consider culling, they are: open, old, odd, and ornery. There is no particular order you should cull in, but I would recommend culling the open cows first. An open cow is costing your operation money and has no return on your investment. As for the other three groups of cows, it will be the judgment call of each producer. Old cows can still be valuable, but their time is limited. The longer you keep them, the greater the possibility of their value as a slaughter cow diminishing. Ornery cows can be a nuisance, but as long as they are producing yearly, they are another one that might be worth keeping around until replacements can be allocated and worked into the system. Odd cows are that group that is very tough to know when to cull. In a normal setting an odd cow might be late calving and very close to falling outside of your management window. An odd cow could also be ugly, the wrong color, or not the right “type” of cow that fits the direction you are trying to go with your operation.

When looking to buy replacement cattle, beware of your source. Remember you may be buying someone else’s problem. For example, a very well respected cattle producer told me that he bought a group of cows from a local source. Those cows were infected with Trichomoniasis and he lost 50% of his calf crop this past year. Remember to beware of the source and potential risks involved.

We have had great market conditions in the cattle industry and potentially will for the foreseeable future. These conditions naturally drive us to want to increase our profit share by increasing our herd size. Unfortunately these two situations work against each
other and make it difficult to do so! But always remember that decisions you make now, can affect your herd for years down the road.

**Implanting Suckling Calves:**
I have received numerous questions recently regarding suckling calf management. One of the most common questions is in regards to the benefits of implanting suckling calves. If we review the literature from the past 30 years, there is a plethora of research that shows the benefits of implanting. We can expect up to a 5-15% increase in weaning weights if the nutritional requirements are met. Many ask about the differences between the brands of implants. While there are some performance differences between them, producers should be more concerned with just taking advantage of the implant and getting it administered correctly, regardless of brand.

The following resource on proper implanting techniques is from the University of Tennessee extension:
https://utextension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP694.pdf

**Creep Feeding:**
We also get many questions on creep feeding rations. I speculate that with the current market and the cheaper feed costs, there may be more interest than usual. Dr. Rick Rasby from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has done a great job laying out the pros and cons of creep feeding in the article at the link below.

**Corral Design:**
I also have received a few inquiries in regards to the “Bud Box” that was used by Dr. Ron Gill in his low stress cattle handling demonstration at the LSU AgCenter Northwest Beef and Forage field day. I suspect with the cattle markets as strong as they have been of recent, some producers may be interested in investing some of their income into improving their facilities. The below link is to information on Bud Box design:
http://agrilifecdn.tamu.edu/beefinfo/files/2014/01/Designing-a-Bud-Box.pdf

Here is another great LSU AgCenter resource for corral and pen designs that not everyone may be aware of:
http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/our_offices/departments/Biological_Ag_Engineering/Features/Extension/Building_Plans/beef/corral/