PREGNANCY DIAGNOSIS IN BEEF CATTLE FACT SHEET

Why should you pregnancy test?

There are many benefits to pregnancy diagnosis in your beef cattle, these include:

- Early detection of non-pregnant cattle – decisions can be made early about what to do with unproductive stock, either culling non-pregnant stock or running them separately to pregnant stock for better pasture utilisation.
- Early detection of a reproductive problem – as early as 6 weeks after bulls are removed a reproductive problem can be picked up in your herd. Low pregnancy rates in one particular mob, for example, might indicate problems with an individual bull. Poor fertility throughout the whole herd might be caused by an infectious disease or perhaps inadequate nutrition prior to mating.
- Effective nutritional management – pregnancy diagnosis allows you to establish the calving pattern of your herd and so allows you manipulate pasture utilisation and ensure appropriate use of supplementary feeding to keep cows in the optimal body condition at all critical stages of the breeding cycle and maximise calf production.
- Selection of replacement stock – the ability to identify replacement cattle that conceive early in the joining period that will enter the herd at an early age and be more likely to reconceive that following year.
    - As a measure of the success of artificial breeding programs – pregnancy diagnosis and aging of foetuses particularly using ultrasound diagnosis, can monitor the effectiveness of artificial breeding programs and allow you to differentiate between cows pregnant to AI or ET and those pregnant to the cover bull.
- Management tool – allows you to accurately budget herd structure, sales and therefore stocking rate.

What methods can be used to pregnancy test?

The most commonly used methods of pregnancy diagnosis are:

Rectal palpation – Rectal palpation involves the palpation of the uterus, the foetus and the placenta through the rectum and is the most common method of pregnancy diagnosis.

Ultrasound examination – Ultrasound diagnosis involves the visualisation of a pregnancy with the use of transrectal examination with an ultrasound probe.

There are several other methods of pregnancy diagnosis available, including:

- Progesterone testing
- Oestrone sulphate
- Early Pregnancy Factor

These methods however can be expensive, less accurate and labour intensive. Due to this they are often not practical on a large scale and have not been widely adopted for pregnancy diagnosis in Australian beef cattle.