

MONROE COUNTY HEIFER EVALUATION AND REPRODUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT: ASSISTING PRODUCERS SELECT AND MARKET SUPERIOR REPLACEMENT HEIFERS FOR ADDITIONAL REVENUE OPPORTUNITIES

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Figure 1 – Recording heifer data chute-side

Figure 2 – Data Measurement Devices: Allflex EID Reader, Tru-Test Indicator and tape measure

Abstract

Replacement heifers are vital to the continuation of sustainable and profitable beef cattle production. Because producers are continuously seeking to improve efficiencies in brood cows and herd genetics, it is in the best interest of the producer to retain only females that excel reproductive and confirmation standards. Through the Monroe County Heifer Evaluation and Reproductive Development (HERD) program, beef cattle producers in Monroe County are able to select and market superior replacement heifers for additional revenue opportunities. Working closely with eight producers more than twenty different measures of data on reproduction, disposition, breeding, pedigree and gain were recorded by the Extension Agent on 450 heifers during the period of November 2018 through April 2019. After the initial screening test, the better quality heifers were selected as HERD program heifers while heifers that did not meet minimum requirements were culled. Sixty heifers were catalogued for the Monroe County HERD Bred Heifer Sale. From the sale, a total of \$104,150 of revenue was generated for Monroe County producers from an average sale price of \$2,107 per heifer and the overall highest selling heifer was \$3,800. Artificially Inseminated heifers sold, on average, \$959 more than similar heifers that were bull-bred. After fifteen successful years, the Monroe County HERD sale is continuously proving that Georgia producers are in demand of genetically superior bred-heifers in order to continue to improve their own herd genetics and are willing to pay a premium.



Figure 4 – 15th Monroe County HERD Sale on-farm auction held May 11, 2019 on Sleepy Creek Farm

Introduction

The estimated economic value of beef cows in Georgia account for \$455 million, or 76%, of the \$592 million beef cattle industry according to the 2017 Farm Gate Value Report. Beef cattle producers need to take advantage of increased demand for high quality breeding stock. Because replacement heifers are vital to the continuation of sustainable and profitable beef cattle production; it is in the best interest of the producer to only retain females that excel both reproductively and in confirmation standards.

The Monroe County Heifer Evaluation and Reproductive Development (HERD) program has established an outstanding on-farm program for heifer development and value added marketing that is modeled after the University of Georgia HERD program.



Figure 5 – 2019 Monroe County HERD Sale Heifers are sorted by breeding.

Materials & Methods

Twenty different measures of data on reproduction, disposition, breeding, pedigree and gain were recorded on 450 heifers during the period of November 2018 through April 2019. Heifers were tagged with an Electronic Identification (EID) tag and data points were recorded chute-side using an Allflex EID reader and Tru-Test Indicator. All program heifers were synchronized using CIDRs (Controlled Internal Drug Release) and Lutalyse and bred by Artificial Insemination (A.I.) to proven, superior A.I. sires known for calving ease, growth rate and carcass traits. Natural service sires known for calving ease were used as cover bulls and put in with the heifers two weeks following the A.I. program. (Figures 1 and 2)

Producers vaccinated their heifers at least four weeks prior to beginning the program for IBR/BVD/P13/BRSV, 7-Way Blackleg, 5-Way Lepto, and Pasteurella Bacterin Toxoid. Heifers were also dewormed. In addition, heifers were tested free for Persistently Infected-BVD. Heifers are confirmed safe-in-calf at least three weeks prior to the sale by a veterinarian. (Figure 3)



Figure 3 – Pregnancy verification three weeks prior to the HERD Sale by Dr. Hays Fyke.

Impacts and Discussion

Eight farms in Monroe and surrounding counties developed approximately 450 commercial heifers using the HERD protocol. After an initial screening test the better quality heifers were developed as HERD program heifers. Heifers that did not meet minimum reproductive requirements, had poor disposition scores, or pregnant were eliminated from the HERD program and culled. Producers retained only heifers that passed all data check points and confirmed safe-in-calf for breeding stock. Participating producers had the opportunity to nominate HERD heifers to the annual on-farm sale. Sixty heifers were catalogued for the 15th Monroe County HERD Bred Heifer Sale held on May 11, 2019 at Sleepy Creek Farm. From the sale, a total of \$104,150 of revenue was generated for Monroe County producers with an average sale price of \$2,107 per heifer and the overall highest selling heifer was \$3,800. Heifers that were A.I sired and A.I bred sold, on average, \$959 more than heifers that were bull-sired and bull-bred. The Monroe HERD Sale was more economically beneficial to producers than the UGA HERD sales held in Tifton and Calhoun where the sale averages were \$1,688 and \$1,260 respectively. (Figures 4 and 5) (Table 1)

After fifteen successful years, the Monroe County HERD sale is continuously proving that Georgia producers are in demand of genetically superior bred-heifers in order to continue to improve their own herd genetics and are willing to pay a premium.

15th Monroe County HERD Sale Average by Sire/Breeding Saturday May 11, 2019							
A.I. Sired/A.I. Bred		Bull Sired/A.I. Bred		A.I. Sired/ Bull Bred		Bull Sired/Bull Bred	
AIS/AIB AVG	\$ 2,561	BS/AIB AVG	\$ 2,078	AIS/BB AVG	\$ 1,777	BS/BB AVG	\$ 1,603
19 HERD Sale AVG	\$ 2,107	19 HERD Sale AVG	\$ 2,107	19 HERD Sale AVG	\$ 2,107	19 HERD Sale AVG	\$ 2,107
Above Sale AVG	\$ 454	Below Sale AVG	\$ (29)	Below Sale AVG	\$ (330)	Below Sale AVG	\$ (505)
High	\$ 3,800	High	\$ 3,500	High	\$ 2,050	High	\$ 1,875
Low	\$ 1,500	Low	\$ 1,500	Low	\$ 1,550	Low	\$ 1,350

Table 1 – Price Comparison of Heifers Sold Based on Parentage and Breeding

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