

# Reproductive Management

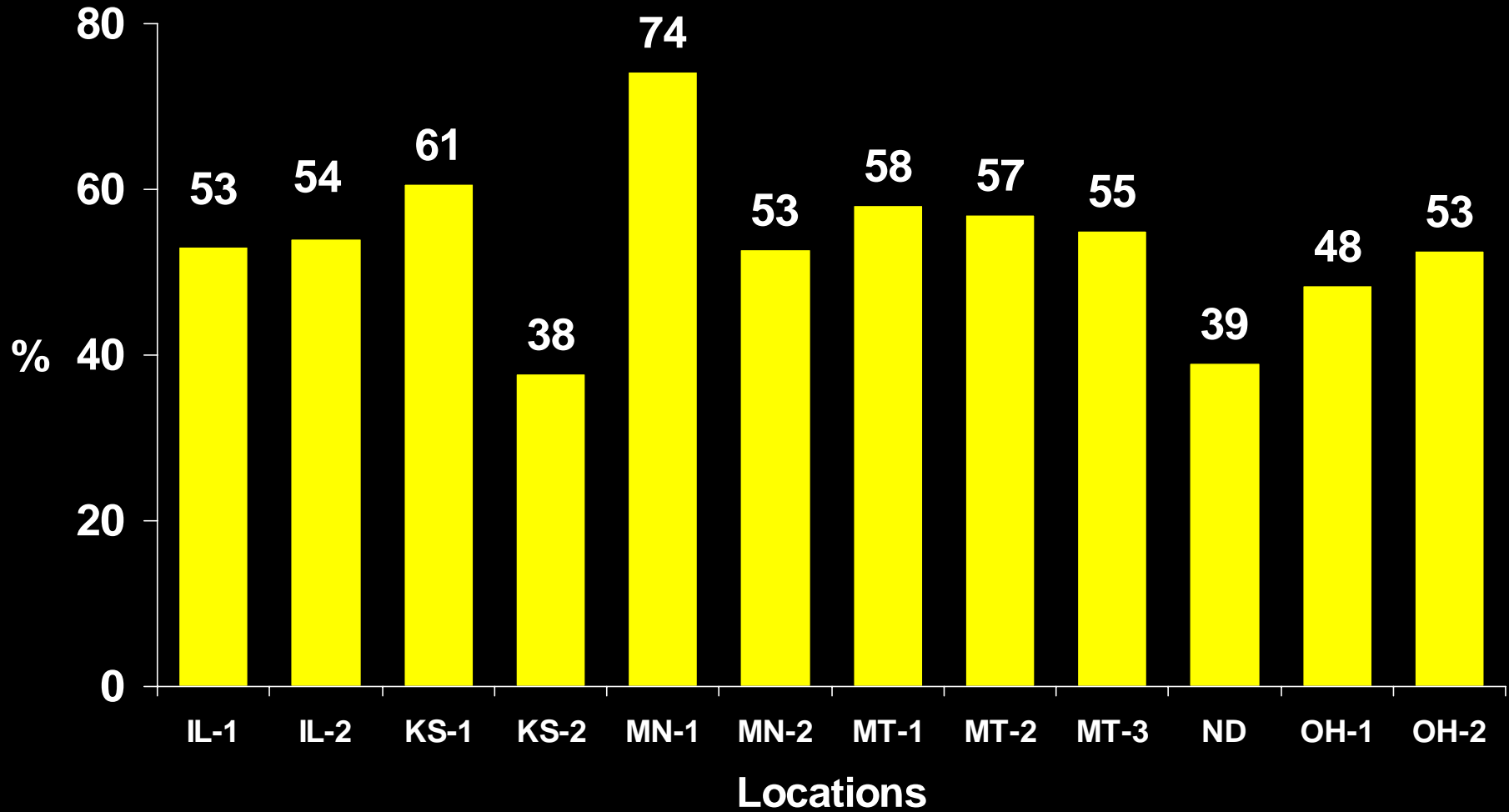
**Rick Funston**  
**Reproductive Physiologist**  
**University of Nebraska**



A dramatic landscape at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, and a bright sun is visible near the horizon, casting a warm glow. A powerful lightning bolt strikes the ground in the distance, illuminating the scene. The foreground shows silhouettes of trees and hills.

**Reproduction is  
the single most  
important factor  
for profitable  
beef production.**

# Effect of Location on Pregnancy Rates



**Can you cull a cow based on one year's progeny carcass data when you don't know who the sire is?**

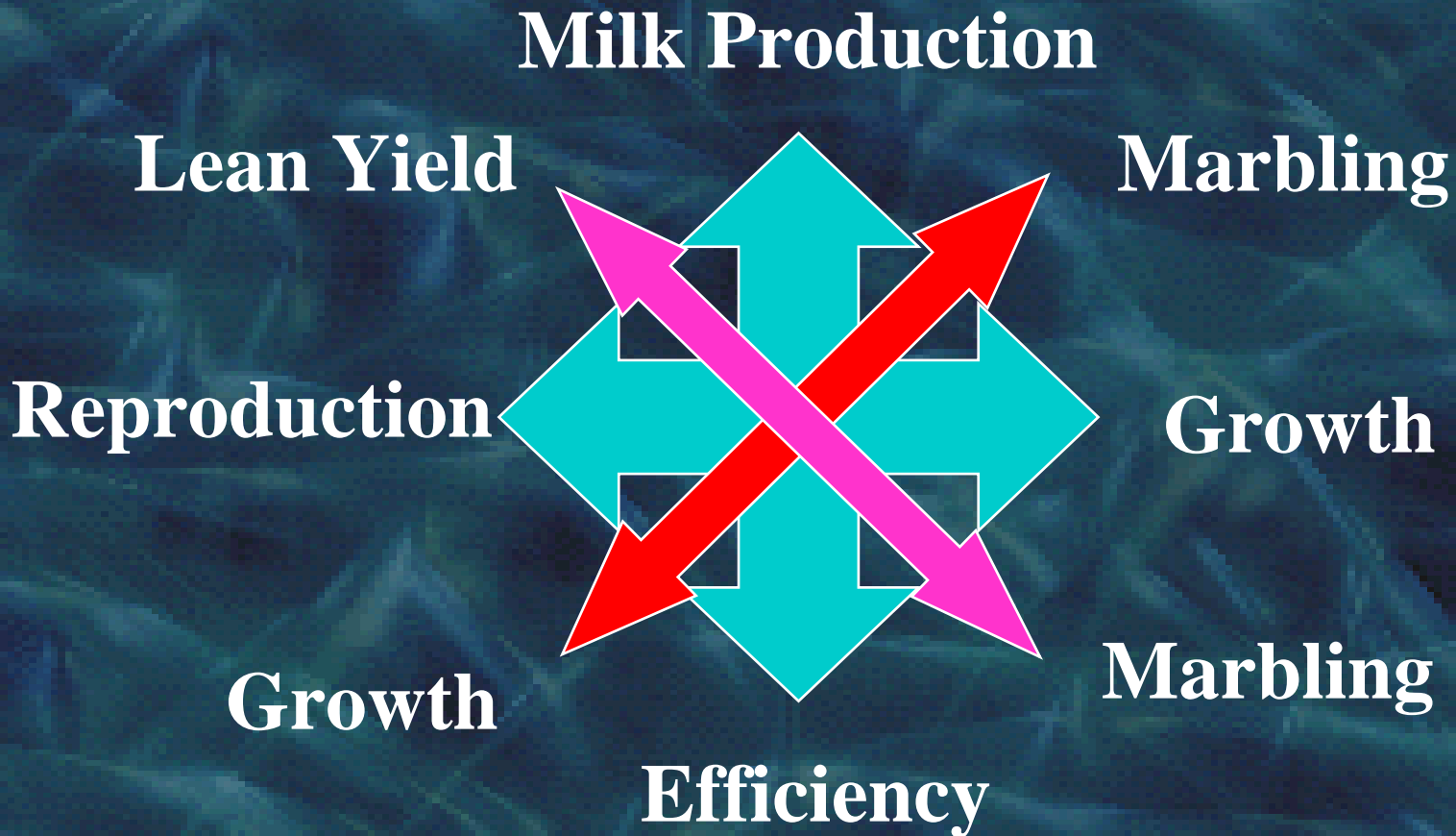


# Sire Selection

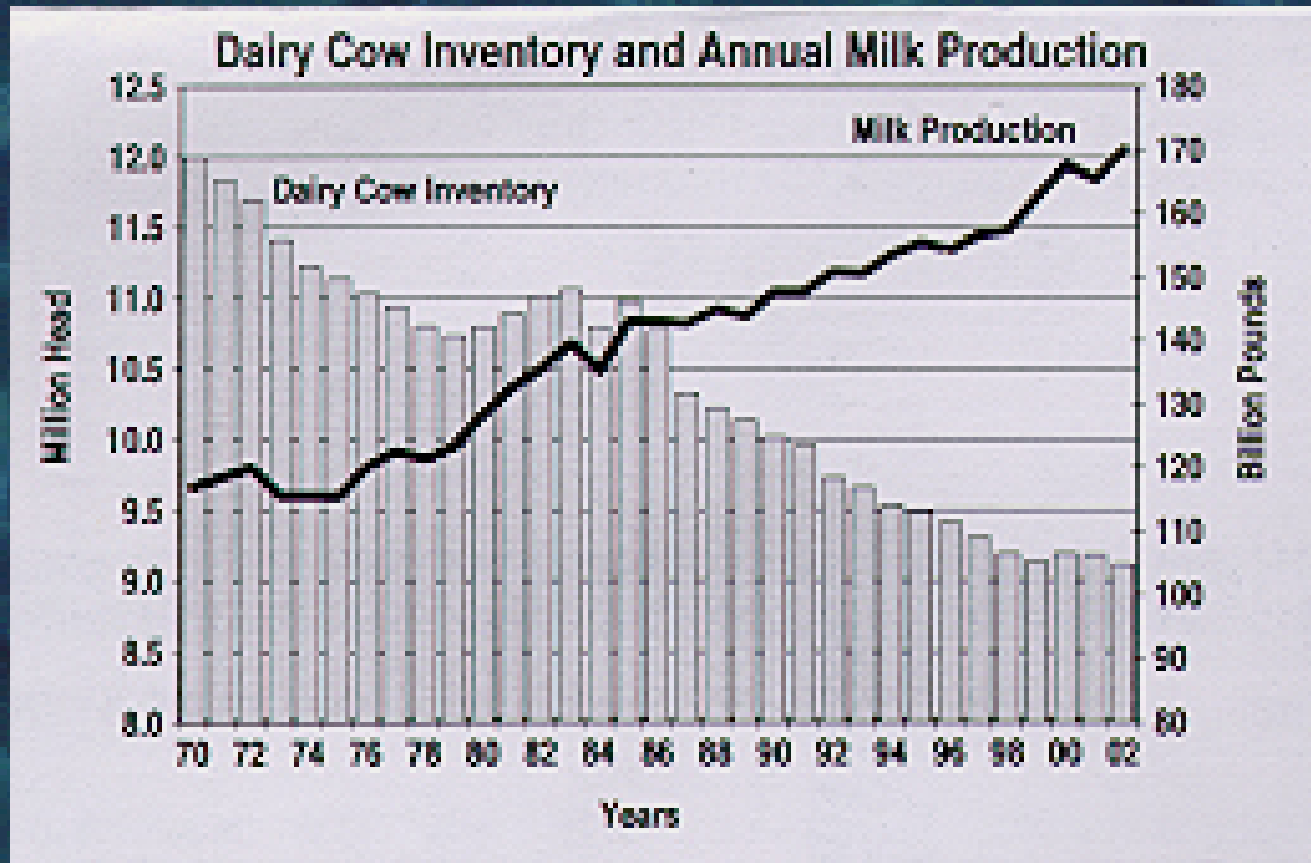
- ★ **Determines more than 85% of the total improvement made in a herd**



# Which Direction to Go?



# What happens when you practice single trait selection??



**The effective population size of the US Holstein breed is 36 head**

# Our marbling push may be taking a toll on fertility

The premiums paid for high-grading cattle have almost led to a situation of single-trait selection for intra-muscular fat (IMF), or marbling, in the U.S. beef industry. While history teaches us the folly of single-trait selection, the current rush for marbling poses significant potential for lowered fertility in U.S. beef cattle.

If we accept the premise that androgens (testosterone) have a demeaning effect on IMF, then the ultrasounding of bulls to determine IMF from a sire group could certainly lead to lower fertility and later puberty.

Consider this scenario: You have 100 bulls to ultrasound that are of varied frame sizes of 5 through 7. Age at scanning is 11½ to 12½ months.

The 5-frame bulls have probably reached puberty and are at high testosterone levels. The 6- and 7-frame bulls are perhaps at a lower level of testosterone and thereby show more IMF (if of equal genetic predisposition).

The early puberty bulls would show more activity because they are burning more energy. Testosterone, acting as a repartitioning agent, allocates more nutrients to muscle and less to IMF.

As a result, the later-puberty bulls — with lower testosterone levels — would show an advantage on ultrasound readings for IMF.

Even if all the bulls were of the same frame size and equal puberty, we still have a strong chance of bias. If some of the bulls are of a high libido

nature, they may burn twice the energy as average or lower libido bulls. This would turn a buyer away from such bulls if he were looking for balanced traits.

The industry needs some basic research to determine:

- When is an appropriate time to read IMF in relation to testosterone levels?
- What happens to IMF at high testosterone levels?
- How do low-fertility bulls read on IMF?
- Would the use of heifers in determining a sire's progeny reading for IMF be less antagonistic to fertility?

What it boils down to is that while we are measuring variables in IMF, we may also be ignoring great

variables in testosterone levels. Thus, we're putting ourselves at great risk of unconsciously avoiding high-fertility bulls.

I have found little research that tests the correlation between IMF and testosterone. It should be an industry research priority as there's no production trait with greater economic consequences for beef producers than fertility. ♦

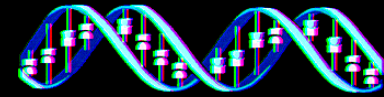
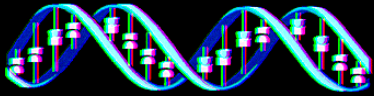
*Jim Bradford owns and operates the Brad Z Ranch, a purebred Angus and purebred Gelbvieh operation in Guthrie Center, IA. The current chairman of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association Research Committee, Bradford has been a producer leader of national beef research efforts for the past decade.*



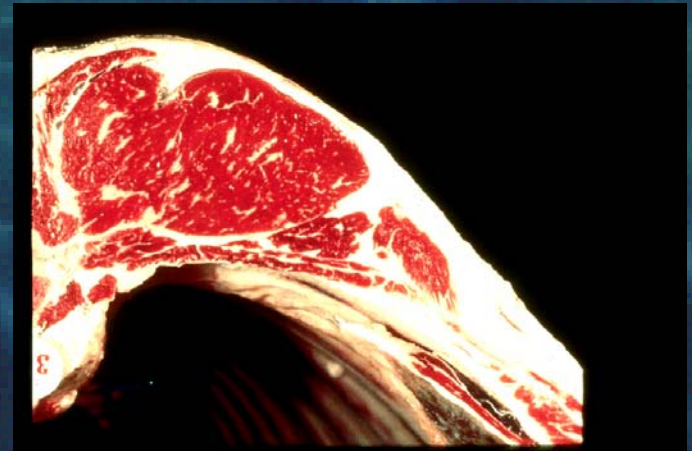
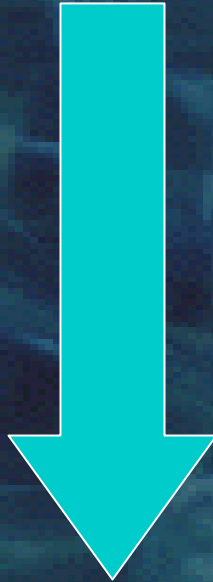
**"We may be ignoring great variables in testosterone levels."  
— Jim Bradford**

# Delayed Implanting in Steer Calves

	<b>Re-Implant Weight</b>	<b>HCWT</b>	<b>Yield Grade</b>	<b>Choice (%)</b>
<b>Delay</b>	914	797	3.18	92
<b>Not</b>	930	802	3.26	68



# Common MYTH



*All we need to do is find the  
\_\_\_\_\_ gene and all of  
our problems will be solved.....*

# Genetic testing has me excited all over again

## Tests show what's behind EPDs.

I haven't felt this much excitement for 15 years. Fifteen years ago, seedstock breeders began waking anew to the value potential of their product—in particular, to the carcass traits valued by consumers. Because of this awakening, we now have EPDs for marbling, EPDs for leanness, EPDs for ribeye size, EPDs for fat, EPDs for carcass size, and EPDs for retail yield. Today, these 15-year-old visions are paying big dividends through value-based marketing. But we may have just "scratched the surface."

I'm excited again because we seem to be at the base of a whole new wave of technology—genetic tests that show why EPDs are what they are. This is technology that may lift our breeding programs and our product to even greater heights.

I'm excited, for example, because of the excitement of John and Mary Ellen Wozney of Coolville, Ohio, who are figuratively seeing double these days. John and Mary Ellen are Murray Grey breeders and they're excited about a bull named Katuna Courageous. Corey, as the bull is popularly known, was imported from Australia in 2001. Corey

turned out to be a special bovine. In technical terms, Corey was found earlier this year to be double homozygous for the carcass traits of marbling and tenderness. This means that Corey carries two copies of the favorable form of the marbling gene plus two copies of the favorable form of the tenderness gene. It is estimated that

fewer than 5 percent of all cattle on earth are double-double for these traits.

This double-double characteristic means that each of Corey's sons or daughters is guaranteed to inherit one copy of the marbling gene and one copy of the tenderness gene. If mated to a double-double female, Corey's offspring, too, will be double-double for these traits.

I'm excited because of the excitement of Jim Gibb, an old hand in this country's performance breeding program. Dr. Gibb, who once headed the performance program of the American Polled Hereford Association, is now managing partner of Frontier Beef Systems of Lafayette, Colo. Frontier recently announced the marketing of *TenderGENE*, a new tenderness test developed by scientists at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (MARC) in Nebraska.



Fred Knop

*TenderGENE* is a Calpain tenderness test. Calpain is a naturally occurring enzyme that plays a major role in beef tenderness by weakening muscle fibers. This weakening increases tenderization during the post-mortem aging process. The *TenderGENE* test can be conducted on hair, blood or semen to find breeding bulls, cows and replacement heifers that possess favorable tenderness genes. Two Calpain SNPs (Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms) have been identified. Animals carrying genes for both SNPs have been found to be 20 percent more tender in populations of Simmental and Angus-cross fed cattle.

I am excited, too, about the discovery of a DNA test for marbling that is awaiting a marketing arrangement.

The big question now is whether it will take us 15 years again to weave new technology into our breeding programs. How long will it be before we see offerings of double-double bulls, or even single-single bulls? How long will it be before pedigrees of breeding stock will carry both EPDs and carcass genes?

There is already considerable activity afoot. I understand that DNA testing is being conducted by major seedstock producers in this country and abroad. Scientists at MARC are busily recharacterizing the numer-

### READY FOR THE RAIL TEST



Genetic testing of parent stock will greatly increase the chances of progeny to grade at high rates for important carcass traits.

ous breeds in their decades-old germplasm evaluation program, including their genetic makeup. A three-day workshop on DNA technology will be held at the Embassy Suites hotel in Kansas City beginning Dec. 4 (check the Beef Improvement Association's Web site for details).

I felt both excitement and confidence back in 1988 when, as editor of this publication, I saw the convergence of elements and attitudes that led us into the EPD era and the era of value-based marketing. I see this convergence occurring again and I feel the same excitement and confidence that this new wave will carry our breeding programs and our product to even more exciting levels.

To contact Fred Knop, write Drovers or send e-mail to [fredlyn@aol.com](mailto:fredlyn@aol.com).



INDUSTRY COMMENTARY

## Not a silver bullet

### Expectations for the future of DNA testing

R. Mark Thallman

**B**eef cattle breeders have heard for years that DNA testing is coming and that it will change the way they breed cattle. At long last, the time is here when DNA testing for economic traits is available, albeit in a very immature form. Breeders must decide whether to use the technology, and if so, how to use it. DNA testing has a number of potential applications in cattle breeding, including parentage testing, tests for genetic diseases or defects, and tests for qualitatively inherited traits such as color or horns. However, most economically important production and end-product traits are influenced by several or many genes and are known as “quantitative traits.”

Several DNA tests for quantitative traits have become commercially available recently and the number of such tests is expected to increase rapidly over the next few years. Considerable information about a DNA test is required in order to decide whether to use it. The National Beef Cattle Evaluation Consortium is developing a process for the independent validation of DNA tests to help cattle breeders decide

which DNA tests will be most effective for them. Several tests have already been through the process.



DNA testing can make evaluations available anytime after birth, which is important for traits that can only be measured late in life or postmortem.

Although some continued collection of phenotypes will always be required, DNA testing should allow greater information to be extracted from each phenotype that is measured. This is especially important for traits that are expensive to measure or sex-limited.

The availability of DNA testing will bring, along with all of the advantages, misuse of information, especially in the early years when only a few DNA tests are available. We have heard much discussion of the evils of “single-trait selection.” Breeders must now face the temptation of “single-gene selection,” which may have far greater consequences.

For example, a bull with one of the top (high accuracy) EPDs in his breed for a trait had the least desirable, but most common, genotype (test result) for a DNA test for one of the genes affecting the trait. Semen sales on

this bull dropped off sharply following the release of the test result. Apparently, breeders decided that they could not use bulls with the less favorable allele (form) of this gene, a prime example of “single-gene selection.”

This is understandable, but it is not good use of DNA test information because the DNA test provides information about only one of the genes influencing the trait, whereas the EPD provides an estimate of his total genetic merit at all genes that influence the trait. DNA test results should not greatly influence our estimate of the overall genetic merit of individuals with high-accuracy EPDs. However, DNA testing can contribute substantial information about individuals that would otherwise have low-accuracy genetic evaluations, and this is where it is most useful. Education on the effective use of DNA testing is becoming a priority.

In the short run, DNA testing should not be expected to simplify cattle breeding. Selection decisions will be based on more pieces and types of information and breeders will have to decide which tests to run and which animals to test. It is a real challenge to integrate DNA test results with EPDs to make the most effective selection decisions.

In the longer run, the goal is to integrate DNA test results into the existing national cattle-evaluation process so that selection can be based on the resulting DNA-adjusted EPDs, which will weight the information from each DNA test result, the phenotypes and the pedigree appropriately, to provide the best estimate of genetic merit from the information available. The National Beef Cattle Evaluation Consortium and the Beef Improvement Federation are developing the basic framework for this process. Successful implementation will require the joint cooperation of DNA testing companies, breeders and breed associations. There are challenges in using DNA testing effectively in beef cattle. Nonetheless, cattle breeders are making strides in implementing DNA testing and are making changes in traits, such as tenderness, that have been difficult to select for in the past. Undoubtedly, the way in which DNA testing is used by the beef industry will change over time, but the early adopters of the technology are likely to be in a better position to capitalize on that change.

*R. Mark Thallman is a research geneticist, U.S. Meat Animal Research Center ARS-USDA*

# Breeding on a Chip

**Meat Quality**

**Red Meat Yield**

**Disease Resistance/  
BRD Susceptibility**

**Growth Curve  
Benders**

**Cost of Gain /  
Days to Finish**

**E. coli Resistance**

R  
E  
P  
R  
O  
D  
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I  
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N

# Heritability Estimates (%)

Heifer Pregnancy .....27

Stayability.....10

Response to selection is slow,  
Heterosis is more important

# Advantage of Crossbred Cows

**Trait**

**Maternal Heterosis**

**Longevity**

**1.2 yrs (44%)**

**Calf Weight/Cow Exposed**

**74 lb (25%)**

**Net Profit/Cow Exposed**

**\$70**





“If you are looking for additional fertility and production from your cowherd, Sim x Angus or Sim x Red Angus females are the way to go. In over 48,000 comparisons from our heifer development program, we routinely observe an 8 to 10% increase in fertility from these hybrid-line females when compared to straightbreds. This combined with superior milk and maternal traits, make these females hard to beat in any production system.”

*Dr. Patsy Houghton, General Manager,  
Heartland Cattle Company, McCook, NE*

# Longevity of Crossbred Dams Varying in Size and Milk Prod.

Biological Type of F1 Dams		% in Herd
Sire Breed	Milk Prod.	> 6yrs
Medium	Medium	64
Medium	High	55
Large	Medium	41
Large	High	38



# Heifer Management Practices Prior to Weaning

- ☞ **Implants**
- ☞ **Creep Feeding**
- ☞ **Cow Productivity**
- ☞ **Freemartins**



# Replacement Heifer Selection

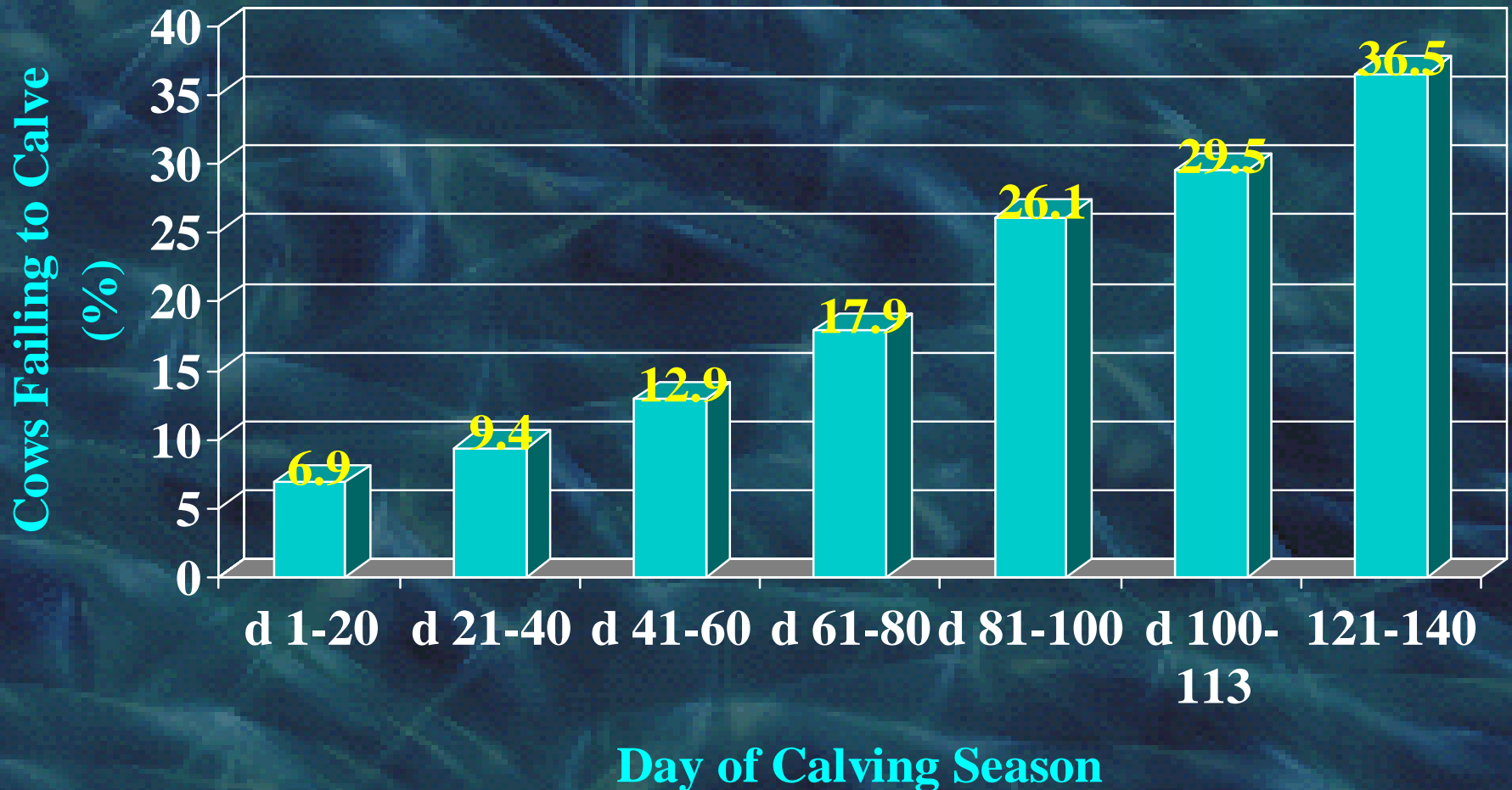
1. Cull daughters of “bad mark” cows
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

# What are “Bad Mark” Cows\* ?

1. Cows that need help calving
2. Cows that calve late (+42 days)
3. Cows that fail to wean a calf
4. Cows that have big teats/need help
5. Cows that wean a light wt. calf
6. Cows that have “attitude” problems

\* assume opens are culled

# Effect of Calving Date on the Number of Cows Calving the Following Year



(Patterson et al., 1992)

# **Replacement Heifer Selection**

- 1. Cull daughters of “bad mark” cows**
- 2. Cull light wts., big birth wt & 6 frame**
- 3. Cull youngest (born +45 d. calving )**
- 4. Select daughters of oldest cows**
- 5. Optimum (not maximum) preg. rate**
- 6. Pigmented eyes & udder**
- 7. Form = depth rib, chest width, guts**

# What about before birth?



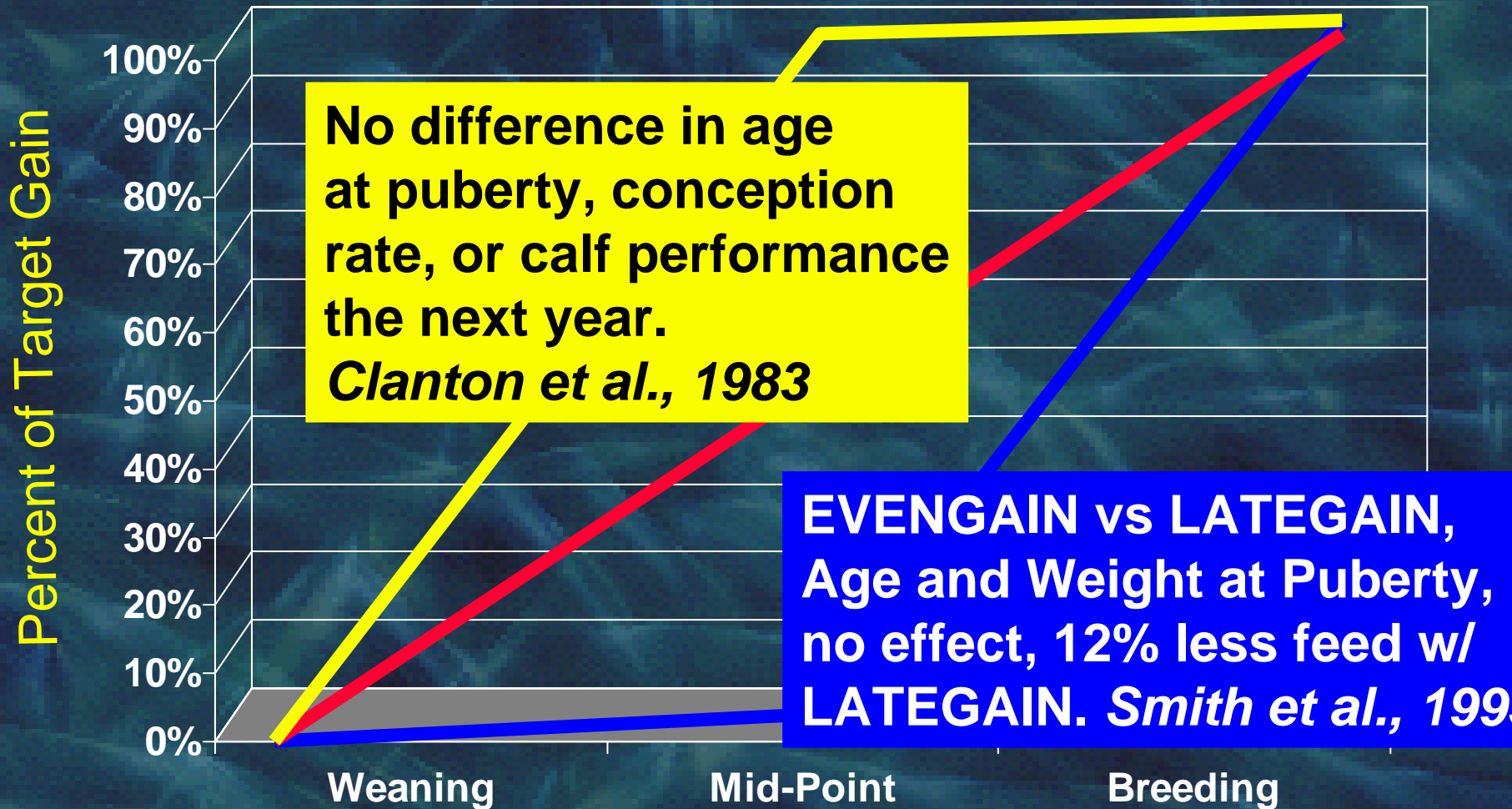
# What about before birth?

<b>N = 170</b>	<b>No Supplement</b>	<b>Supplement</b>
<b>BW</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>WW</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>469</b>
<b>ADJ 205d Wt</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>499</b>
<b>Weaning Age</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>190</b>

# What about before birth?

<b>n = 39</b>	<b>No Supplement</b>	<b>Supplement</b>
<b>Preg Check, Wt.</b>	<b>787</b>	<b>807</b>
<b>BCS</b>	<b>5.68</b>	<b>5.88</b>
<b>Preg, %</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Service Preg, %</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>94</b>

# Effect of Time of Gain From Weaning to Breeding on Heifer Performance



# What is the appropriate Target Weight??

<u>% Mature Weight</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>58</u>
Pregnancy Rate – 1st	92	88
-2nd	91	91
-3rd	94	92
-4th	96	96



# What is the appropriate Target Weight??

<u>% Mature Weight</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>55</u>
Breeding Season	60 d	45 d
Pregnancy Rate	87	90
Calve Date	3/15	3/9
Birth Weight	75	75
PG Wt. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Calf	903	926
2 <sup>nd</sup> Preg. Rate	91	92

# Heifers developed to 50% mature weight

	<b>MGA</b>	<b>No MGA</b>
<b>April 24</b>	<b>577</b>	<b>577</b>
<b>Cycling, %</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>45 d preg, %</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> cycle, %</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Wt. Preg check, lb</b>	<b>795</b>	<b>785</b>



# Feeding to a "Target Weight"

% of Mature Wt @ breeding

<u>Item</u>	<u>55%</u>	<u>65%</u>
Pre-breeding wt	600	683
Conception (21d)	30	62
Calving wt.	834	897
Calf birth wt.	71	73
Calving difficulty,%	52	29
Calf death loss,%	6	5

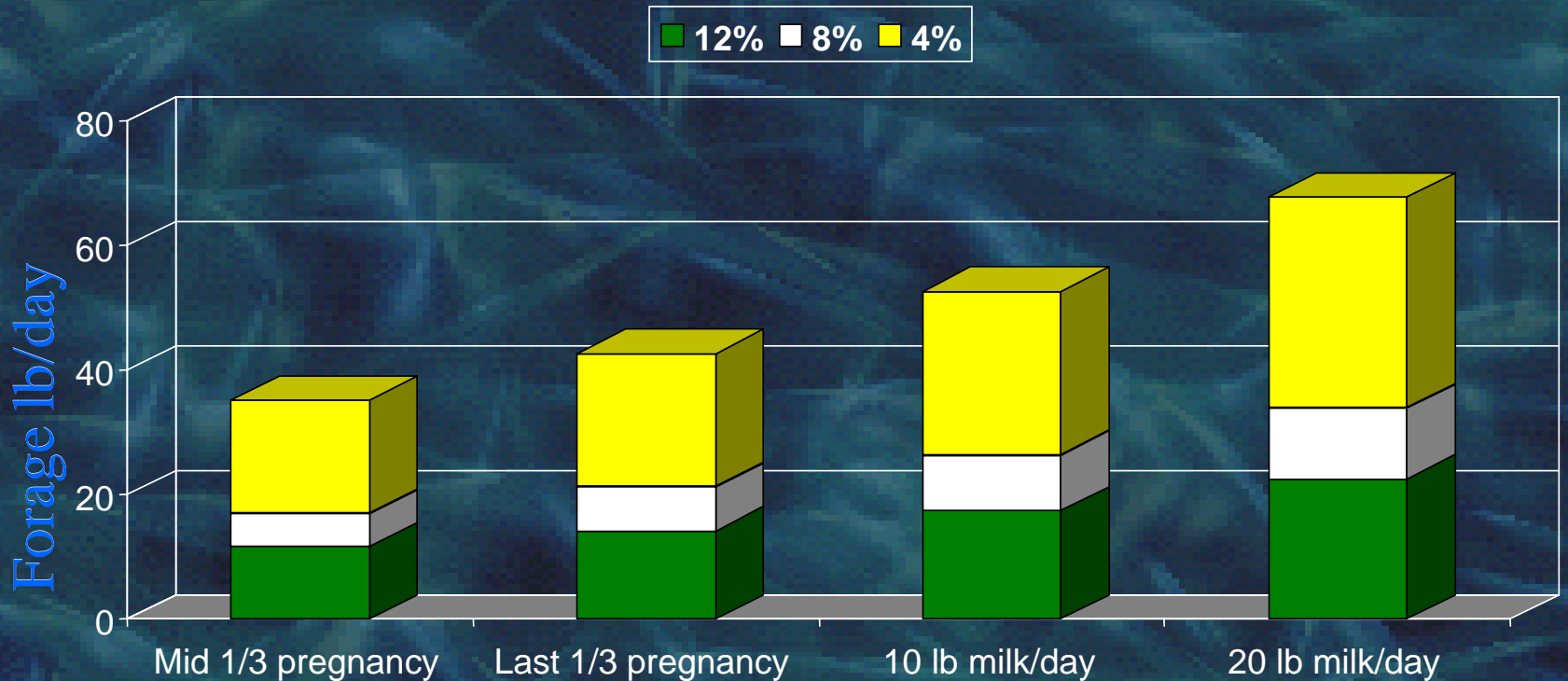
# **BALANCED NUTRITION: KEY TO OPTIMIZING PRODUCTION**

- ✓ **Protein**
- ✓ **Energy**
- ✓ **Minerals**
- ✓ **Vitamins**
- ✓ **Water**



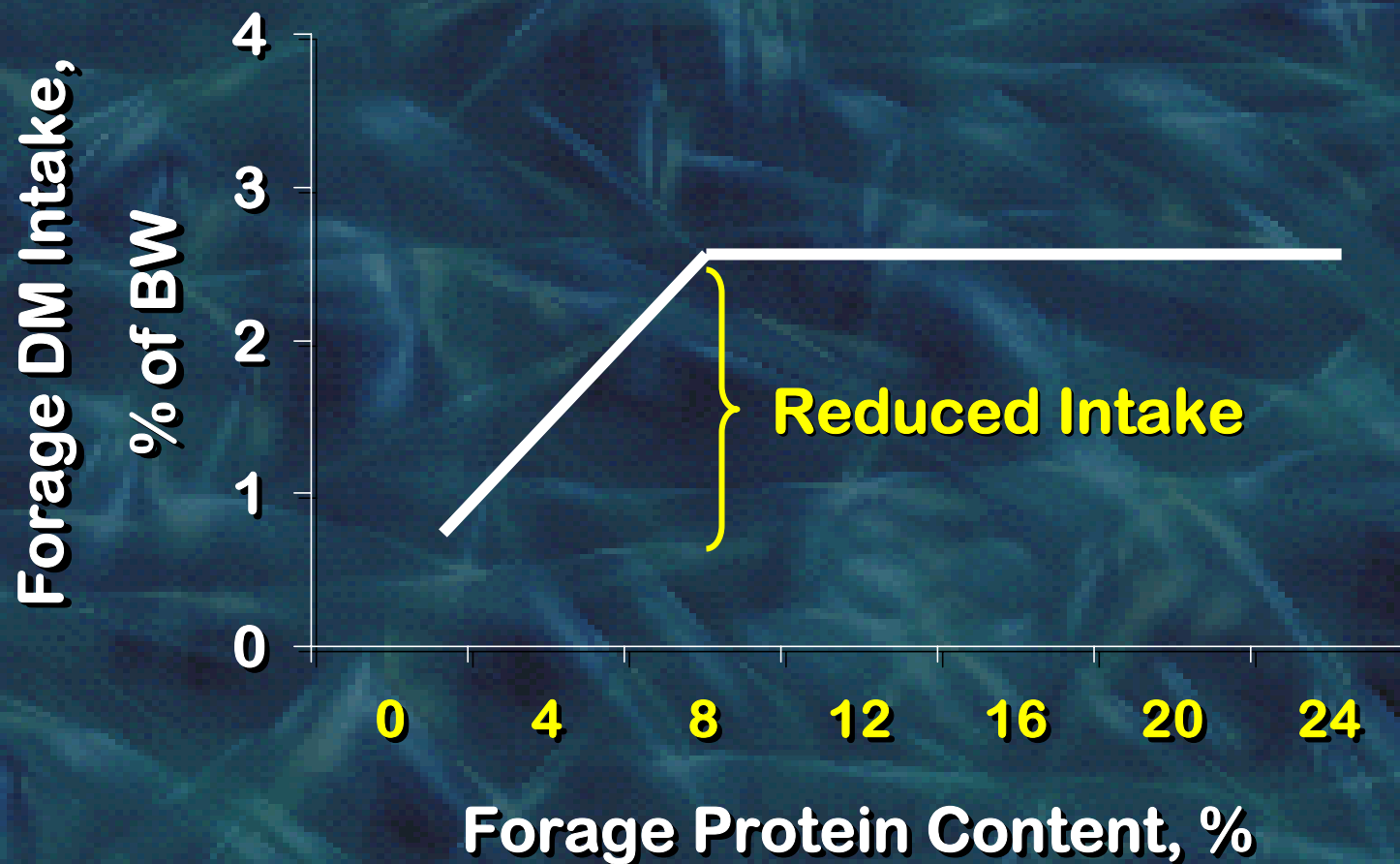
# FORAGE INTAKE NEEDED TO PROVIDE PROTEIN REQUIRED

## FOR PREGNANCY AND MILK (1200 POUND COW)



Physiological Status of the Cow

If protein content falls below requirements, then energy intake can be reduced



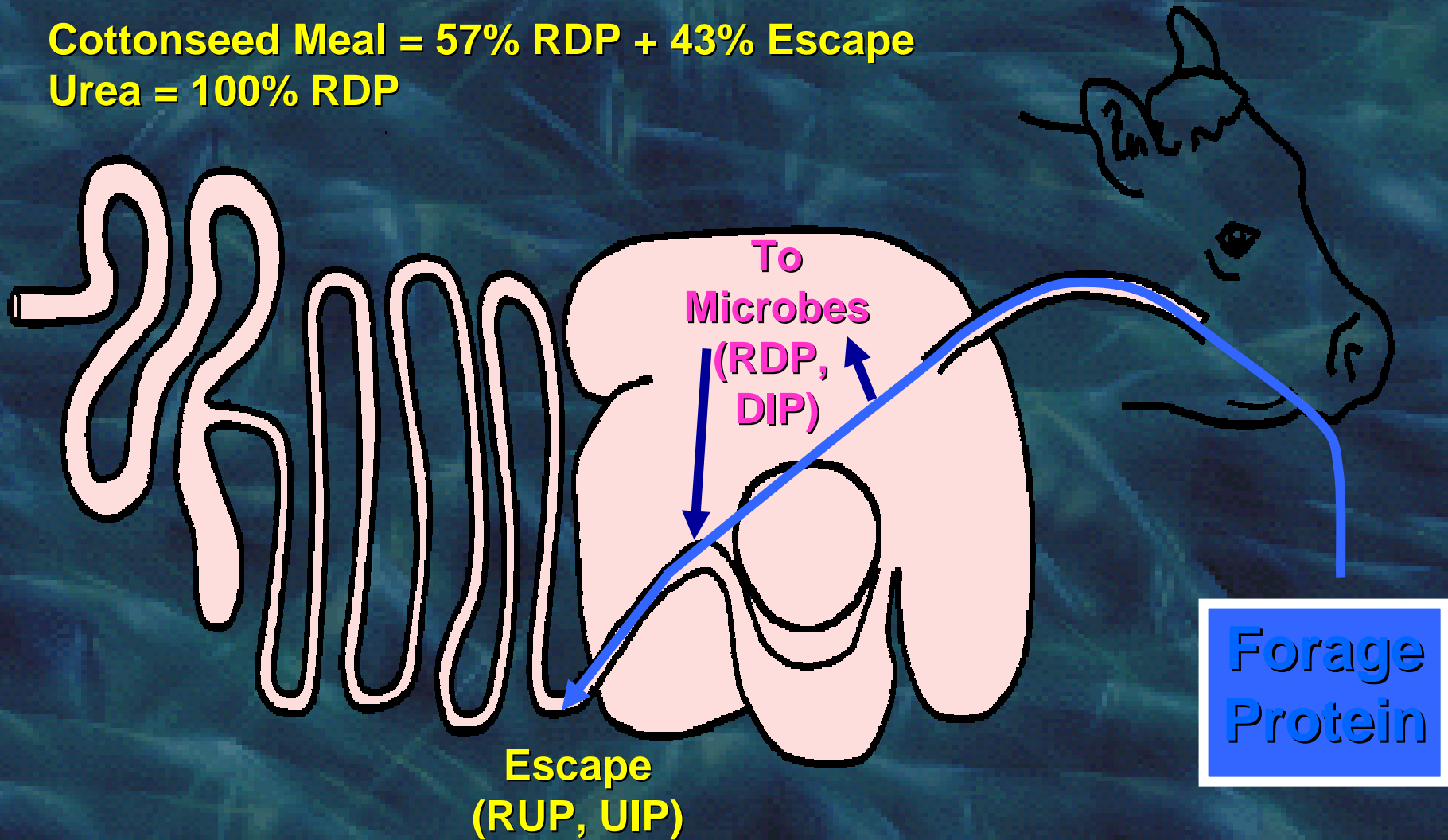
Mathis, 2000

# Excess Protein

- Heifers fed excess protein had lower first service conception rates (82 vs 61%).
- Beef heifers grazed pastures either N fertilized or not, and supplemented SBP or not.
- Embryo survival not statistically different (68 and 74 % for high and low N, and 65 and 76 % for non supplemented and supplemented).

# Rumen Function

Cottonseed Meal = 57% RDP + 43% Escape  
Urea = 100% RDP



# Excess UIP

- ❖ **Negative effects on several hormones that positively influence reproduction when fed at high level (.71, .55, .25 lb/d; Kane et al., 2000).**
- ❖ **Heifers fed additional UIP during development reached puberty at a later age and heavier weight, fewer serviced in 1<sup>st</sup> 21 d (.55 lb/d; Lalman et al., 1993).**



## Gluten Feed

- ➔ 24% CP (75% DIP)
- ➔ .9% P
- ➔ 3.9% fat
- ➔ 80% TDN
- ➔ 36% NDF-little pH  $\Delta$
- ➔ <40% ration DM



## Distillers Grains

- ➔ 30% CP (35% DIP)
- ➔ .8% P
- ➔ 11% fat- limits use
- ➔ 88% TDN
- ➔ 40% NDF-little pH  $\Delta$
- ➔ <40% ration DM

# University of Illinois

- ❖ **100 Simmental Cows**
- ❖ **Fed 13 lb Corn Gluten Feed + 10 lb alfalfa or 12.26 lb DDG + 10 lb alfalfa**
- ❖ **60 % AI pregnancy rate**
- ❖ **97.1 % (CGF) vs 90.7 % (DDG) after 45 d cleanup**

# University of NE

- ❖ 54 2-yr-old cows
- ❖ Fed 3 lb DDG or WCGF as a protein source in a total mixed diet for 60 d postpartum
- ❖ Blood samples collected every 14 d, no difference in cyclicity
- ❖ Synchronized with Hybrid Synch + CIDR
- ❖ 65 % (DDG) vs 64 % (WCGF) AI pregnancy rate

# Alfalfa Pivots



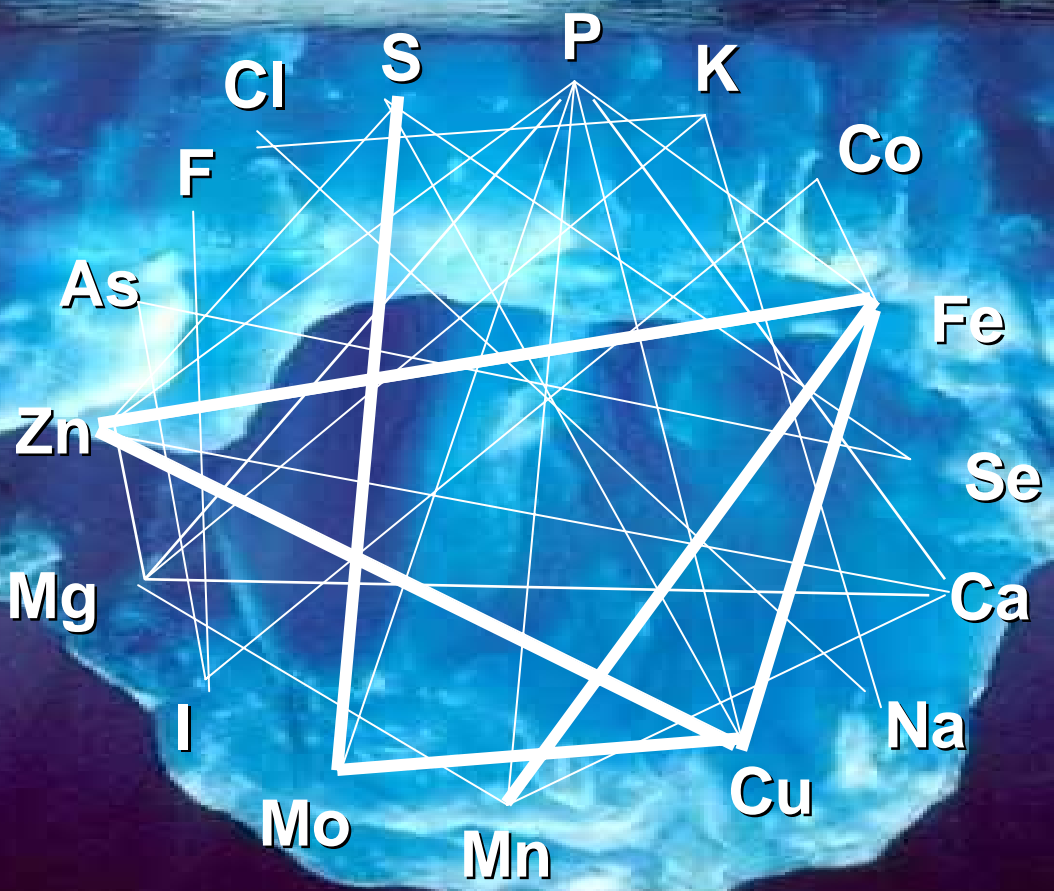
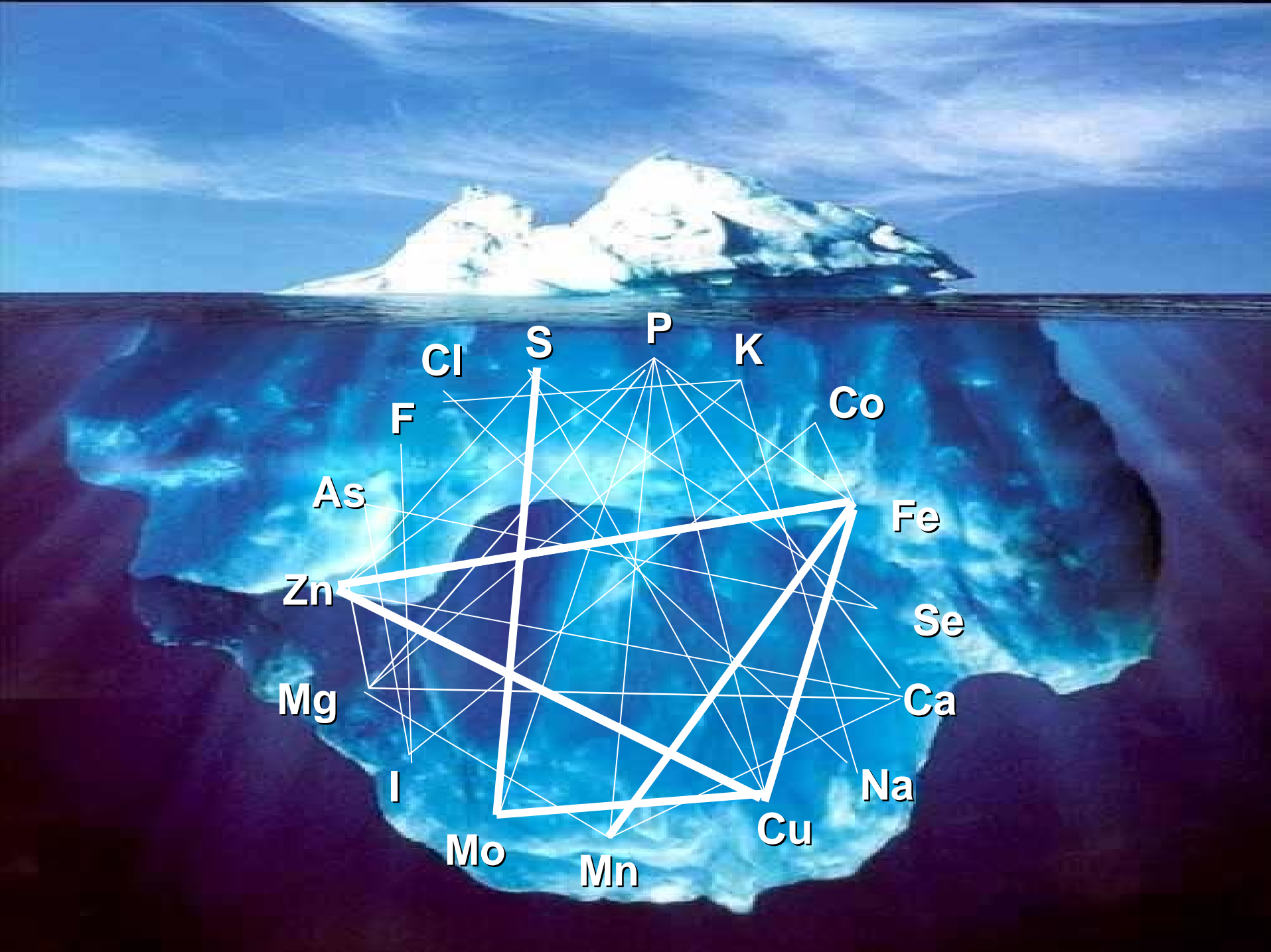
**Excess nitrogen?  
Phytoestrogens?**

# Excess Protein Summary

Consumption of diets very high in crude protein have been implicated in negatively influencing reproduction

Probably more correctly, when available dietary energy is low for rumen microbes and excess ammonia is present, decreased fertility may occur

DIP vs UIP excess



# Heifers fed excess Mo had:

- **Delayed puberty**
- **Lower ovulation**
- **Lower conception**

**Phillippo et al., 1984**

# Pre-calving Nutrition



# Effect of Pre-Calving Nutrition on Birth Weight and Calving Difficulty

Energy level (TDN)	Birth Wt.	Dystocia
Low (11 lb)	58	26
Medium (14)	62	17
High (17)	64	18

Protein Level(%NRC)	Birth Wt.	Calving Ease
75	81.4	1.8
100	85.8	1.6
150	83.6	1.8
200	88.0	2.0



# Calving Assistance

## Stage II

Item	Late	Early
Calf Vigor	1.1	1.2
PPI	51	49
% in heat	82	91*
Services/conception	1.24	1.15
Fall Pregnancy	78	92*
Calf ADG	1.63	1.74*
Calf WW	387	422*

# Effect of Rumensin on Puberty and Conception Rates

Group	No. heifers	% Cycling	% Bred
Rumensin	24	92	55
Control	26	58	47

Treatment	Age @ Puberty	% Pregnant
High Roughage	383	83
Rumensin +90% HR	369	96
Rumensin +100% HR	369	96

# Effect of sire on pregnancy

<b>Sire</b>	<b>Pregnancy</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>G</b>	<b>68</b>

# Technician Effects

**Tech    Preg Rates**

**1            67**

**2            44**

**3            61**

**4            41**

**5            62**

**6            76**

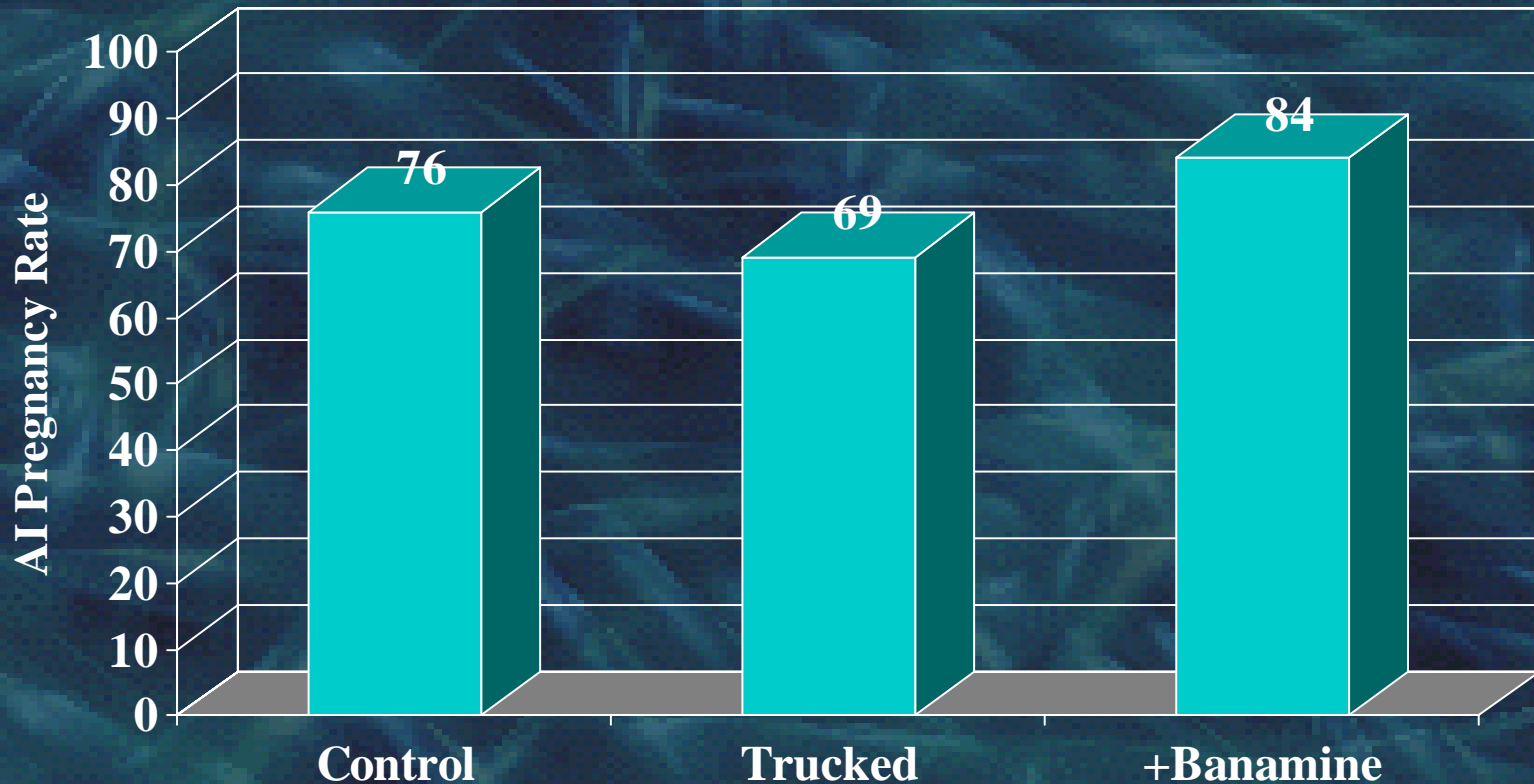
**7            60**

# Handling Cattle after AI

## Day Transported after AI

	1 - 4	8 - 12	29 - 33
Synchronized Pregnancy Rate	74%	62%	65%
Breeding Season Pregnancy Rate	95%	94%	94%
Mean Day of Conception	9.6	13.4	13.6

# Effect of Banamine on Trucking Stress



32 cows/trt; trucked 4hr; d 12-15

# **Factors that Affect Estrous Response & Conception Rates**

- ✓ **Body Condition**
- ✓ **Age, Parity**
- ✓ **Postpartum Interval**
- ✓ **Percent Cycling in Herd**
- ✓ **Nutrition**
- ✓ **Weather**
- ✓ **Correct Application of Protocols**

# Questions???



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