

LIVESTOCK

Timeliness plays critical role in agricultural operations

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A commonality among successful producers that I have noticed is their ability to accomplish tasks in a timely manner. A few examples of activities best accom-

plished within a certain timeframe on the cattle side are purchasing calves, doctoring sick calves, administering vaccinations and assisting with calving. On the crop side, successful producers generally take advantage of windows for planting, fertilizer, and herbicide and pesticide application.

While all of these successful producers accomplish tasks in a timely manner, they absolutely do not accomplish them by the same means. For some of these producers, agriculture is their full-time job. For others, it is only a supplemental income. The key is that each of them has figured out how to get things done. Many times, those who have full-time jobs off the farm realize that custom hire allows them to accomplish things that otherwise would not get done. Others may find their custom hire is less than dependable on accomplishing tasks when they need to get done.

It is important for producers to always ask themselves if they are accomplishing things on time. If not, why? Barriers to timeliness come in many forms



including priorities, other responsibilities and obligations, knowledge, labor, and machinery to name a few. There is typically a cost associated to removing barriers, though not always, and becoming timelier may or may not be cost-effective.

In some instances, the benefit of timeliness can be measured. For example, we know that the earlier wheat is planted the more fall forage is produced. On average, wheat pasture grows 30 pounds per acre per day in the fall prior to frost. If a practice could

be implemented that increased the number of growing days in the fall by 10, then 300 pounds of additional fall forage could be grown. If a conversion rate of wheat forage is assumed at 10:1, then 30 pounds of additional beef per acre could be harvested. At 40 cents per pound of gain, this gives us a measurable benefit of \$12 per acre in revenue. Can this practice be implemented for less than \$12 per acre?

For those in the stocker cattle business, getting calves purchased correctly is perhaps the largest factor



in making a profit. Does your operation allow you to receive these cattle when the timing is right? Are there aspects of your operation that limit flexibility in the timing of purchasing cattle, such as pen space or a labor shortage? These situations are a little more difficult to measure.

A practice that all producers can employ that has minimal cost and improves timeliness is forward planning. A lack of forward planning allows things to slip up and puts timeliness in peril. Opportunities can be created and barriers can be addressed through forward planning.

Agricultural operations are very dynamic, and there are many variables to consider when making decisions. Our relationship with Mother

Nature and other variables, such as markets, dictate that things be accomplished in a timely manner when opportunities present themselves. Many operators constantly ponder these questions subconsciously. If you don't, I encourage you to brainstorm about the things that have kept you from accomplishing tasks at the optimal time and explore cost-effective remedies. ■