

Heat Detection Tips for Cattlemen

Early Signs - Before Cow is in Standing Heat

1. A small string of mucus may drip from a reclining cow a day or two before she is in standing heat.
2. A heifer bawls when others are quiet. This sign is not often observed in cows.
3. She is more alert and observant, looking around and watching for other cows in heat.
4. She walks in a rapid, business-like manner. While other cows saunter, she walks as if she has places to go.
5. She may be standing up when all of her herdmates are lying down.
2. Hair on the tail or rump may be slightly matted where mucus has dried.
3. There may be mud on the hips or hair rubbed off where other cattle have ridden.
4. If heifers have been branded several weeks earlier, the scab may have been rubbed off during riding.
5. A cow that is tired from riding at night may be one of the few cows in the herd lying down.
6. If the cow has been in heat, mucus will often be expelled when a breeding tube is inserted.
7. If the cow has been in heat during the past few hours, the inseminator will note that the vagina is more slick and the cervix more dilated.

Signs of Standing Heat

1. She sniffs other cows much as a bull does when he checks for heat.
2. She stands to be ridden (the single best sign of heat).
3. She attempts to ride other cows.
4. She places her head on the back or rump of another cow or throws her head as if attempting to mount. When she mounts, a copious string of mucus will often be expelled. If she is in heat, pelvic thrusts will be vigorous - much like a bull.
5. Mucus can often be seen on the tail or rump.
6. She will attempt to join other cows in heat. If a fence prevents this, she will walk back and forth.
7. Cows in heat will stand closer together than normal. An aerial photo would show cows in heat standing much closer to each other than the rest of the herd.
8. She may be followed and/or ridden by young bull calves as young as 3 to 4 months of age.
8. A string of blood on the tail or rump is an indicator that the cow was in heat two to three days earlier.

Other Signs of Heat

1. Vulva is more swollen, moist and smooth than when the cow is not in heat.
2. Lining of the vulva becomes dark pink or bright red in color.
3. The cow butts heads with other cows.
4. Udder and teats may become tighter because calf has not had the opportunity to nurse.

Time to Check Heat

1. A Canadian study showed that 68% of mountings occur between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. (25% from 6:00 p.m. to midnight, and 43% from midnight to 6:00 a.m.). Therefore, late in the evening and early in the morning are the best times to watch cows for heat.
2. Take plenty of time when checking. A few minutes is not sufficient. Take 20 or 30 minutes of constant observation.

Late Signs - Cow Has Just Gone Out of Heat

1. She has wet or matted hair, particularly over the top of the shoulders.