

Issue 3: Alternative Methods for Confirming Pregnancies

Welcome to the third issue of the ESTROTECT™ Breeding Advocate series.

After removing bulls from service or artificially inseminating your cows, your next task is to wait and see if your cows are pregnant. While some ranchers choose to let Mother Nature take its course, there are alternative methods that may be used to confirm pregnancies more quickly. Common options include:

Ultrasound Testing

Ultrasound tests are the quickest and most reliable method to confirm pregnancies. Trained veterinarians or technicians administer a probe into the cow through the rectum and review ultrasound readings through a viewing device – usually either a monitor or viewer goggles. Some newer devices may also be used abdominally.

Ultrasound tests determine the viability of the fetus, the presence of twin pregnancies and the condition of the ovarian structures.

Rectal Palpation

Rectal palpation is a pregnancy confirmation process of feeling the cow's uterus through the rectum. All pregnancy confirmation is done completely by touch. For more accurate results, perform rectal palpation two months after the cow has been bred when the fetus should be large enough to feel.

Rectal palpation takes practice and skill. We recommend always consulting with a veterinarian or bovine practitioner for assistance.

Blood-Based Testing

A.I. and semen companies are now offering blood-based testing to help confirm pregnancies. Blood samples are drawn and sent to a certified laboratory to determine the presence of specific proteins that indicate the cow is pregnant. Test results are usually returned within a few days.

Blood-based testing is a newer technology that is continuously improving, and results are not as reliable as ultrasound tests performed by a well-trained technician.

Rub-Off Heat Detection Tools

The same principles that are applied to determining cows in standing heat may also be applied to confirming pregnancies. Since mounting activity is the primary visual sign of standing heat, any method of determining evidence of mounting activity can help in identifying cows that are not likely pregnant.

After removing bulls from service or artificially inseminating your cows, apply rub-off heat detectors and monitor over the next 18-24 days – the typical heat cycle for a cow. If the rub-off heat detector displays any evidence of mounting activity, the cow is not likely to be pregnant. If the rub-off heat detector does not display evidence of mounting activity, there is a high probability the cow is pregnant and should be confirmed by other methods.

Recent timed-A.I. trials from South Dakota State University compared a specific brand of rub-off heat detection patches to blood-based tests analyzed by three different labs. The results showed that rub-off technology heat detectors performed equal to or better than all three blood-based tests in confirming pregnant cows*.

For ranchers that cannot wait to confirm their cattle are pregnant, there are many options to consider.

For more information on ESTROTECT™ Heat Detectors and other Innovative Herd Management Tools, visit www.ESTROTECT.com.