

Top 10 Heat Detection Tips

The single, most important management requirement for a successful A.I. program is effective heat detection. Incorporate these 10 tips into your program to ensure maximum results.

10. Gathering together: Cows in heat tend to congregate together. Animals remain in these groups from preheat through standing heat and leave the group when they go out of heat. Observing cow grouping should not only help you identify the cows in heat, but others associated with them.

9. Hot spots: These groups also show a preference for certain locations or "hot spots." Hot spots may be determined in part by the footing available. Soft and dry areas are more likely to promote mounting activity. Locating hot spots should help in observing more estrous activity. When locating hot spots remember there are certain situations that could cause false identification of heats. Animals that are being moved, are confined in a small space or are being fed may falsely mount others.

8. The most opportune times: A Canadian study (King & Hurnik, 1975) indicated the frequency of mounting begins to increase around 8 p.m. and remains high through the late night and early morning hours. The lowest level of mounting activity is between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. How can you maximize the opportunity to observe these late evening and early morning heats and make them part of your regular schedule? Make heat detection the first and last chore of the day.

7. Use heat detection aids wisely: As a supplement to visual heat detection, incorporate heat detection aids into the reproductive program. Popular heat detection aids are estroprotect patches, chin-ball markers and Kamar patches.

6. Write it down: It is important to record heat information. If you are doing a thorough job of heat detection, there is going to be too much information to try to remember so use a notepad, chalkboard or mobile device. Record all heats displayed, keep tabs on other animals involved in mounting and other estrus-related activity, and record other helpful herd management information. Once the information is written down, remember to transfer it to your permanent herd records.

5. Positive identification is necessary: Positively identifying animals in heat will help ensure the correct animals are bred at the correct time. To accomplish this, use a highly visible identification system (ear tags, neck chain tags, etc). Without a good identification system, it is too easy to incorrectly identify animals.

4. Frequency: Successful estrus detection requires that you check for heat *at least* twice a day. Since the length of estrus can often be less than 12 hours in length, it's absolutely necessary that you check at least twice a day so as to not miss those shorter heats. The more often you check heat, the less you will miss.

3. Time well spent: You cannot satisfactorily perform heat detection while doing other chores. It's too important! Take sufficient, exclusive time to observe all animals. A period of 20 to 30 minutes is recommended to allow enough time to assure animals in heat the opportunity to be mounted.

2. Know and recognize the signs: There's no point to heat detecting if you don't know what you are looking for. Through the pre-heat and true estrus periods, there are many secondary signs. The cow's vulva or external parts of the reproductive organs become red and swollen as blood flow to the reproductive organs increases. The cow's behavior begins to change; she becomes more restless and excitable. Licking and chin rubbing on the rumps of other animals can be observed and, she will attempt to mount other cows. A significant change takes place when the cow enters true estrus. Only during true estrus will the cow actually stand when mounted by other animals. This is the number one sign of heat! Motor activity also increases significantly during estrus. Even cows in tie stalls or stanchion barns will be more active - getting up and down more and shifting around in their stalls.

1. Stick to the plan: Establish standard operating procedures and stick to them. Lay out the entire plan, in writing. Decide who is going to heat detect, how often they will do it, when they will do it and for how long. Use consistent methods to record heats and use that information to guide your A.I. procedure.

