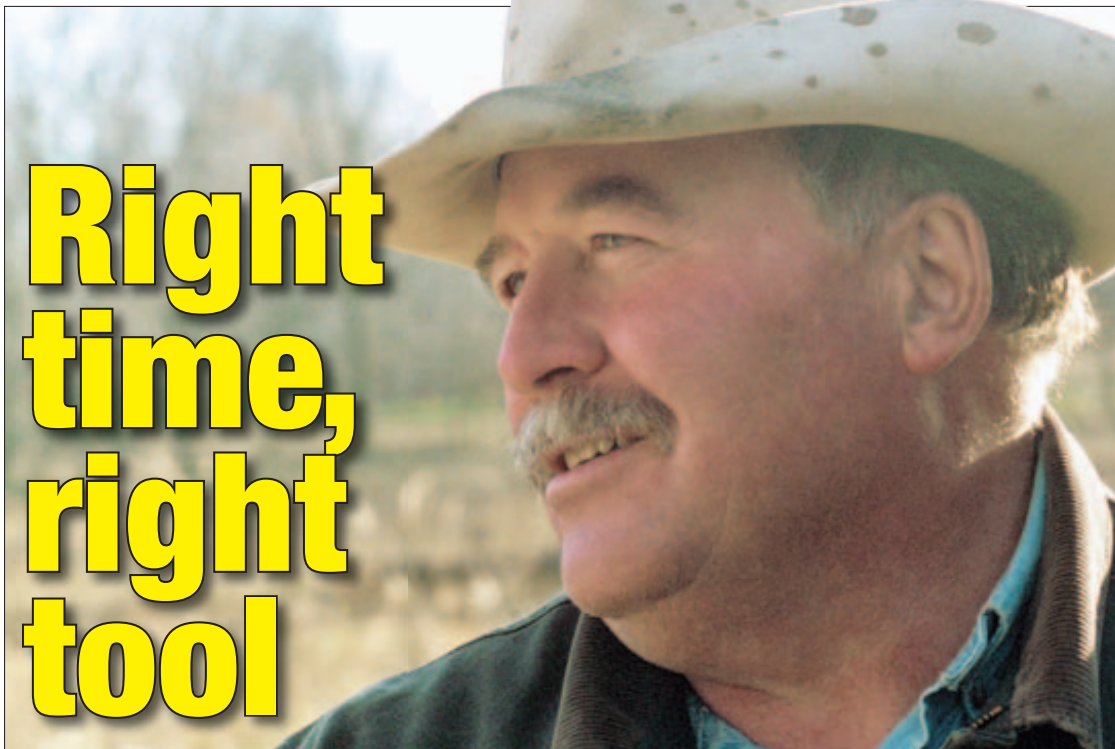


# MISSOURI RURALIST

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## Right time, right tool



MIKE KASTEN, Millersville beef producer, welcomes genetic-improvement tools such as timed artificial insemination.

By DUANE DAILEY

**T**HE hours spent watching his 350-cow beef herd to check for cows in heat are over for Mike Kasten. "Timed artificial insemination is a real time-saver," says the Millersville beef producer.

In the past, Kasten heat checked the herd two or three times a day for 45 days, through two estrus cycles, on horseback. That has all changed. "I could set a date right now for November and know what morning I'm going to breed," he says.

Kasten used AI for 31 years and had learned the benefits of genetically proven sires. Five years ago, when David Patterson, University of Missouri beef reproduction specialist, proposed synchronizing estrus cycles and inseminating all cows on one day, Kasten was ready. A founding member of the Show-Me-Select Replacement Heifer program, Kasten knew the value of pre-breeding exams and extra management for heifers.

### Key Points

- Tedious heat checking is thing of the past at Kasten beef farm.
- Timed AI improves cow herd reproduction efficiency.
- Records and data prove timed AI saves time and adds value.

He has heard all the arguments against timed AI. Some think it's too much work to run cows through the chute three times to get them bred. Others are concerned about costs.

Kasten couldn't believe chute work would be more time-consuming than heat detection. To verify, he timed the process. For cows, chute time averages five minutes, 20 seconds per cow for all three trips. Heifers take longer, about 23 minutes.

And cost? The timed AI tools (Cervical Implant Drug Release implant and hormone shots) cost \$16.20 per head.

But Kasten's return on investment comes in many ways. Uniform size and age calves are easier to market. By using proven AI bulls, he gets

genetics that are worth a lot more. Kasten receives carcass cutout data on all calves at processing. So, he sees the premiums paid on the marketing grid for proven genetics.

Here's an unexpected benefit: By grouping calves, about two-thirds of cows conceive on the first exposure the following breeding season. That means the calf crop is pulled forward, adding average age at market time.

Doing cowboy math, Kasten figures he gets calves on the ground 21 days earlier. Nursing calves eating grass gain another couple of pounds a day. That pays, especially at recent calf prices. "It's easy to add a couple of dollars a day," he says.

Timed breeding isn't expensive considering the return. Kasten is adamant about data. Digging into the books, he can paint a brighter picture for reproduction management.

"It only keeps getting better," he says. "When you are looking at carcass genetics, stacking traits gets more profitable."

AI heifers out of AI cows improve also. "We've about eliminated rebreeding problems," Kasten says. "We were losing heifers in that third year. Not any more." A major value is cow longevity.

Is there a downside? "I've got a bevy of old cows," Kasten says. "It's hard to keep those good replacement heifers at these prices, when the old cow just keeps working. I barely keep enough heifers to maintain the herd."

It's not a bad problem, but still, he figures there are adjustment times ahead on the downside of the cattle-price cycle.

Kasten will tell his story Aug. 30-31 at the Applied Reproduction Strategies in Beef Cattle meeting in St. Joseph.

"Dave [Patterson] gave me a long title: 'A producer perspective on heifer development, reproductive management and marketing,'" Kasten says. He will be ready to fulfill the title with data in hand.

■ See related stories on Pages 6-7.



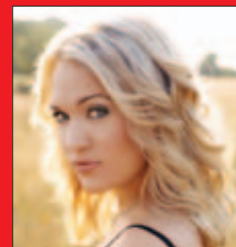
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