

## The Florida Heifer Development Program



Annually beef cattle producers are faced with the decision of how to replace unproductive females within their herd. While in some management systems developing your own replacement heifers is a viable option, for many small (>100 head) producers across the Southeast they simply do not need to replace a substantial enough number of heifers a year to justify the cost of keeping and feeding their own replacement heifers. In addition, some producers do not have the knowledge, experience, or facilities and equipment to efficiently and successfully develop replacement heifers.

In an effort to meet this need within our region. In collaboration with state specialists at the North Florida Research and Education Center in Marianna we have initiated the plans to start the Florida Heifer Development Program. This program is designed to receive weaned heifers at the NFREC in the fall, develop them and expose them to artificial insemination and breeding, with the ultimate goal of sending a pregnant heifer back to the producer in the spring.

The mission of the program is to serve as a resource for cow/calf producers in the Southeastern USA to provide opportunities in education and facilitation of replacement heifer development for enhancement of sustainable beef cattle operations.

The program was designed to meet the following objectives:

- 1) To successfully develop beef replacement heifers for cattle producers using research-based data on nutritional and reproductive management to enhance lifetime productivity of heifers in the beef herd.

- 2) To provide an educational resource that exposes beef cattle producers to improved animal management techniques associated with development of replacement beef heifers and educational opportunities that focus on herd health, nutritional management, and artificial insemination.



Figure 1: Replacement heifers at the NFREC. Photo Credit: Kalya Waters

The heifers will be housed at the NFREC in Marianna during the 187 day development process (October 1, 2016 to April 6, 2017), during which they will be fed to target gains of 1.50 to 2.25 pounds per day. Heifer will be exposed to two rounds of artificial insemination to either an Angus bull selected by the program leaders, or by semen provided by the consignor, and then cleaned up with calving ease Angus bulls for the remainder of the 68 day breeding season. Heifers will be bred to target a starting calving date of September 25, 2017 calving date. Heifers born between August 15, 2015 and November 30, 2015 weighting 1.75 pounds per day of age at time of delivery are eligible for nomination. Heifers must be weaned 30 prior to their October 1<sup>st</sup> delivery and meet all health and vaccine requirements outlined in the rules and regulations. The cost of the program will be between \$550 and \$650, with the variation being accounted for by feed cost.

Nomination of heifers is currently open, with a deadline of August 1, 2016. It is a \$50.00/head non-refundable fee to nominate a heifer. Consignors must be members of the Florida Cattlemen's association. In 2016 the program will accept 100 head of heifers. Each consignor can nominate up to 10 head per operation, heifers will be accepted based on the order in which nomination forms are received. Additional consignments, over 10 heifers, will be accepted on the basis of available space and according to the order in which the nomination forms are received.

For more information about the program please call Kalyn Waters at 850-547-1108 or Dr. Cliff Lamb at 850-526-1612. Nomination forms and Rules and Regulations can be found online at <http://nfrec.ifas.ufl.edu/florida-heifer-development-program/>.

