

# Ozark Stockman

An informal Newsletter for Livestock Producers in the Missouri Ozarks and abroad...

Published by Ted Cunningham, Regional Livestock Specialist, MU Extension

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## Cow Size, Efficiency and Profit...

### Who is your most profitable cow???

Recently at a meeting in Columbia with several other livestock specialists and state extension specialists we had a significant discussion on cow size and efficiency. The discussion was in relation to the development of a computer modeling program that is being designed to help a beef producer determine what size cow and the level of milk production the cow should have to fit a given production environment.

As you can imagine there was heated debate. The folks north of the Missouri river who undoubtedly have ample forage and feed resources seemed to be leaning toward cows that had plenty of milk and were in the 1300 lb range, while folks from the southern region had their sites set a little lower in terms of milk and cow size.

This is not the first attempt that has been made at trying to help producers identify what is optimum in terms of cow size and milk ability. There have been guidelines and ranges of recommended cow sizes based on nutrient requirements and available resources for years. Last year, the American Angus Association (<http://www.angus.org/>) came up with the "Angus Optimal Milk Module" that can help a producer decide what range of milk epd's you should be looking at in purchasing sires which will be used for making replacement females.

## Premier Beef Marketing Opportunities

The South Ozark Premier Beef Marketers, LLC., (SOPBM), are looking forward to another successful commingling and marketing endeavor this fall for calves born in the spring of 2007.

SOPBM is an organization of cattle producers from all over south central Missouri whose members combine calf crops to maximize efficiency and increase marketing leverage. SOPBM accomplishes this goal by co-

I think the development of a "tool" that helps producers target a more efficient and ultimately a more profitable cow is very worthwhile, and if properly used can be very beneficial. I think it can help a producer (especially a new producer) save a lot of time and effort targeting a size and milk production range that should work. However, given the vast diversity of cowherds and breed compositions across Missouri, differences in feed resources, management, and marketing goals, developing a comprehensive and accurate decision making tool is a hefty challenge.

In visiting with folks and observing the diversity of operations in just this region of the Ozarks, it is my opinion that if any given beef producer can answer the following simple yet critical question, then the most accurate answer to the optimum size and milk ability becomes apparent.

Who is(are) your most profitable cow(s)?

It's just that simple. If you can answer this question, and have several years of production records to substantiate the claim, then I think you've determined your model cow which is of ideal size and efficiency.

Of course the problem is that many producers probably can't answer this question correctly. While there are likely producers

mingling like groups of calves at a backgrounding facility, backgrounding for approximately 45-60 days, re-sorting into uniform lots and marketing directly to feedlots. This allows multiple participants/producers the opportunity to market their calves as if they were from one farm, as part of 50,000 lb semi-loads.

In addition to marketing strength, another key concept for this program is the return

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1. Email or call the Dent County Extension office and request to be put on the Ozark Stockman email distribution list.
2. Download the Ozark Stockman from our website at <http://extension.missouri.edu/dent/>. Each bi-monthly issue will be posted on this site as well as archived issues.
3. If you wish to receive this newsletter, but simply don't have internet/email access, give us a call and we'll work something out.

## Culling Decisions

Making correct culling decisions is a critical aspect of the beef cow/calf enterprise. Cull cows account for approximately 20% of most beef operation's annual sales, and aside from additional income, culling allows producers to vastly improve their overall herd performance, and make room for younger more productive animals.

There are many criteria by which cows are typically culled. Some of the common reasons involve cows that failed to calve, cows that failed to calve within a specified calving season, cows that did not breed back after calving, and cows that are old. However, producers should also look at such things as udder scoring, cows that don't maintain a target body condition score (hard-keepers), lameness/feet/leg/hof problems, eye problems, and cows that have poor dispositions.

The use of production records is helping in culling as well. Cows that fail to wean calves of acceptable size, are slow to breed back, and in general cows that fail to produce calves that meet your marketing goals should

all be candidates for culling.

Cull cow markets are typically lower during the fall as producers cull cows and market them at weaning. Interestingly, cull cows are one of the few sectors of the industry that pay a premium for heavier cows, that are carrying more condition. Thus, retaining these cull cows and putting additional weight on them and marketing in Jan./Feb. is an excellent way to make some additional dollars. Producers can also target premium white fat grades by feeding cows high concentrate diets for at least 60 days and selling direct to the packer.

Additional information on culling and targeting premium white fat markets can be found at <http://extension.missouri.edu/explore/agguides/ansci/g02036.htm> or [http://www.angusjournal.com/articlePDF/AJ0805\\_Cul%20Value](http://www.angusjournal.com/articlePDF/AJ0805_Cul%20Value).

## Castration Method and Timing

Method and timing of castration is another commonly debated topic. The increased use and acceptance of bloodless or band castration, which has been touted to be safe for use in older and larger bull calves and hypothesized to add growth to the older bull calves, stirs additional controversy.

Several Universities have looked at the method and timing of castration and effect on pre- and post-weaning performance, as well as carcass traits. A summary of these trials done at Kansas State, Oklahoma State, South Dakota State and Utah State Universities, show no advantage in calf performance by delaying castration. One of these studies indicated no differences in performance when early castrated calves were implanted at castration, but also indicated that those calves banded at weaning in the same study had a 29-day post banding significant decrease in ADG, dry matter intake, and feed efficiency.

Additional research from Utah looked at delayed castration and its effect on carcass quality. This research indicated that later castration dates reduce marbling, tenderness, juiciness and overall consumer acceptability in consumer taste trials.

Researchers recommend that you castrate your bull calves no later than 3 months of age. Castration at an early age causes less stress on the animal. It is also recommended that you use a good implant program following castration. An implant costs around \$1 and there are several implants that will work quite well for your calves. Most implants are **not** intended for use in re-

placement heifers.

The following figures are from "Method and Timing of Castration Influences Performance of Bull Calves", by C.A. Lents, et al., 2001 Animal Science Research Report, Oklahoma State University.

Figure 2. Effect of type of castration of bulls at 2 to 3 mo of age on preweaning average daily gain (ADG; \*P<.05; SEM ± .01)

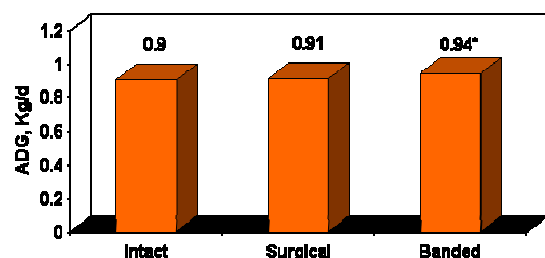
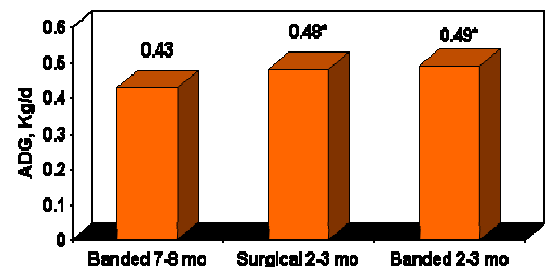


Figure 3. Effect of banding of bulls at 7 to 8 mo of age compared with castration of bulls at 2 to 3 mo of age on post-weaning average daily gain (ADG; \*P<.1; SEM ± .02)



## Cow Size, Efficiency, and Profit...(continued from page 1)

who can tell you which cows consistently wean the biggest calf, which cows breed on the first heat cycle, or who their "favorite" cows are, I'm not sure how many can tell you which cow or cows consistently make them the most profit.

Determining your most profitable cow(s) requires records and then using those records to make accurate decisions. These records need to be based on objective measurements such as calving ease, calving interval, cow weight/frame, BCS at weaning and calving, and amounts, quality, and value of feed and pasture offered. Records on the calves should be geared toward how you market your calves. If you market at or shortly after weaning, obviously weaning weight is important. However, you need to closely evaluate those weaning weights and determine if the calves that weaned the heaviest are actually making you the most money. If your biggest calves just so happen to be out of your biggest cows, I'll bet they aren't truly your most profitable calves.

For folks that retain ownership of their calves and background them, or even own them through harvest, weaning weight becomes even less important since

you're not getting paid on that measurement. Measurements of importance for those cattle should be their growth performance (daily gain, feed efficiency), yearling weight and ultimately their carcass traits and merit. Obviously, health plays a big role in this as well.

I've read about and heard presentations on the theory of culling your least profitable cows. This makes sense as well. From a business standpoint, you wouldn't continue to pay an employee that is not making you much or even losing you money. Likewise, most successful business owners can readily tell you what employees make them the most money, and they could show it to you in black and white, dollars and cents.

So what is the right size and milk ability of a cow in southern Missouri? There's likely a lot of answers. Show me your most profitable cow and we'll run her across a scale, measure her and I'll tell you. Of course if she's truly your most profitable cow, you'll already know this information and we won't need to go to the trouble.

If you have questions on record keeping, measurements, or other variables in determining you're most profitable or optimum cow, feel free to give me a call.

## Premier Beef...(continued from page 1)

of feedlot and carcass data. As part of the bidding process for cattle in the SOPBM program, potential buyers must indicate that they will return data, as well as, give a data recovery cost if any. This allows small individual producers the ability to recover important data that can greatly assist in making cow-herd decisions for future marketings and retained ownership opportunities.

There is not a minimum or maximum number of calves any one producer must enroll. Typically, there will be producers with as few as 3-5 head, and some with as many as 50 head. Cattle enrolled in SOPBM must meet rigid health requirements, be weaned for a minimum of 30 days prior to delivery to the backgrounder, implanted, broke to the feed bunk and waterer, QSA certified and tagged, and consuming at least 2% of their body weight as concentrate at the time of delivery.

At the time of delivery to the backgrounder, calves are weighed individually, and graded by a USDA or MDA grader. Cattle which are light muscled (muscle score 3 or less), small framed, or have other blemishes (horns, blind, physical injury, etc.) are immediately disqualified from entering the program.

The program is governed by its membership, with an elected board of directors to oversee day-to-day operations. University of Missouri Extension provides technical expertise and assistance to the Premier Beef pro-

gram and its producers.

The South Ozarks Premier Beef Marketing Program is an excellent opportunity for serious beef producers wanting to explore new marketing opportunities and find out how their cattle perform in the feedlot and on the rail.

If you're interested in learning more details about the Premier Beef Program or enrolling calves for the Fall 2007 Marketing, give me or one of the following folks a call. Al Vance-Board Member-West Plains 417-256-7460; Craig Evans-Board Member-Lebanon 417-532-2996; or Bob Davis-Board Member-Eldon 573-392-3202.



Producers involved in SOPBM take an annual trip each spring to see their cattle in the feedlot and work to develop positive relationships with feedlot buyers and managers. This group of producers had been looking at a pen of heifers that were being fed at Ashland Feeders in KS.

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## *Calendar of events*

### August

1-4—Phelps County Fair, Rolla

8-11-Texas County Fair, Houston

22-25—Dent County Fall Festival, Salem

### September

13—Beef Days Youth Event, Salem

14—MU Southwest Center Field Day, Mt. Vernon, call 417-466-2148 for more info

15—MU South Farm Field Day, Columbia, call Dr. Bob Weaver for more information, 573-882-5479

### October

5—MU Wurdack Farm Field Day, Cook Station, give me a call or watch your local paper for more information