March 20, 2015

GRAZING SCHOOL TIME
Have you attended one of the grazing schools held here in the southwest part of the state? I’ve lost track of how many students we’ve reached in these 3-day schools but it’s a bunch as we go back into the early 90’s. If I use some guesstimates for just the southwest region I’d say we conservatively have had 2500 students.

I do know when I do surveys on topics related to livestock and forage producers and ask them the number one educational effort they’ve used in recent years, the answer is managed or rotational grazing. We can’t always quantify how many dollars the grazing school experience put in their pocket but it must have significantly benefited many of the students.

We’re now moving into the early part of the grazing school season. There is one in Halfway beginning on April 21. We have one here at the University of Missouri Southwest Research Center, Mt. Vernon beginning on April 28. Registration is now underway and concludes on April 14. Registration fee for the Mt. Vernon location is $140 per person and $225 for couples.

That may seem like a high price but 2500 ± former students can’t be that far wrong when they consistently mention how much they learned and have put into practice. Please call my Mt. Vernon office at 417-466-3102 for details.

BULL ANALYTICS
I’m not sure I know exactly what analytics are and you may have a better definition but it has something to do with performance data and the analysis of it for an intended purpose.

I was reading the sports page a few weeks back and the writer was reviewing all the paces the National Football League teams had put prospective draft eligible players through at the scouting combine. They evaluated the collegiate players for all types of running, jumping, lifting, etc. Of course their intent was to select the players in the draft who should mesh with their current rosters for the chance to be a Super Bowl contender ASAP.

You know that’s exactly what bull buyers should be thinking when they start looking at bull and semen catalogs. Well, maybe not the chance at the Super Bowl but at the chance to improve the overall performance of your herd for profitability purposes. Also for the personal satisfaction that you’ve been able to accomplish genetically.

Pretend you’re one of the NFL coaches as you look over the data on the offering at the numerous bull sales. Do the same thing with AI catalogs.

Our Southwest Missouri All-Breed Performance Tested Bull Sale is set for March 30, 7 pm at the Springfield Livestock Marketing Center. There are 41 Angus, 6 Polled Herefords, 2 Charolais and 1 Shorthorn bull in the offering.

Among the “Super Bowl” prospects are 28 bulls that currently meet the Show-Me-Select calving ease direct, expected progeny difference (EPD) requirement. Thirty-six bulls rank in the top 25% of their breed for weaning weight; 18 bulls rank in the top 25% for potential milk production of their daughters; 20 bulls are in the their breeds top 25% for marbling or intramuscular fat.

I hope many of you will be able to attend this sale if for no other reason just to see the caliber of bulls southwest Missouri breeders are producing. You don’t have to go to Montana, Texas or the Dakotas to find outstanding genetic packages. Those packages exist in this area and they do know about fescue.

One final thought on bull selection. The number one complaint I consistently hear from bull buyers is, “my tested bulls seem to have more hoof problems.” At sales it may be hard to tell if a bull will have hoof problems as their hooves may be covered in shavings or other bedding. If you fall in love with a bull on-paper and you like his appearance, ask the owner or caretaker to help you see his hooves and how he walks.
I start from the ground up when I’m looking at bulls. The hooves and legs have to carry them several miles each day hopefully for several years. Some breeds are working on data that may one day allow them to develop an EPD for hoof structure. Without question, it is a genetically influenced trait.

**GOT WEEDS?**
If you have weedy pastures would you allow University of Missouri to use your pastures for a weed research project this summer? Dr. Kevin Bradley, our state extension weed specialist has asked us to see if we can find some pastures around the state for a non-invasive study of weed problems.

They will not bring any equipment on the land for spraying. They simply want access to the land so they can walk the pastures throughout the growing season at two-week intervals. The information gained from these observations will be shared with the cooperating farmer.

Give me a call if you’d be interested in helping Kevin.

**ENTER STEER FEEDOUT**
Many of you have stated you feel like you’re not getting paid sufficiently for the feeder calves you’re taking to the market. Perhaps you’ve been buying high dollar bulls, using high accuracy, strong EPD bulls but just don’t get just recognition when those bulls’ calves or yearlings enter the sale ring.

Well, that’s entirely possible but what else have you done to get the desired attention. Have you ever fed any of your steers or heifers out and received complete carcass data on them? That’s a start towards recognition. I’ll admit small herds have a difficult time putting together a large enough group of calves to really attract significant buyer interest in cattle even if they gain 4 pounds per day and have high quality and yield grading carcasses.

We’re now accepting entries for our next steer feedout that will actually begin on June 2. Entry deadline is May 10. Entry forms and details are on-line at http://extension.missouri.edu/lawrence/livestock.aspx or call 417-466-3102. Steers born after July 1, 2014 are eligible and there needs to be at least 5 head. There is no upper limit.

Steers must be weaned at least 4 weeks, preferably, 45 days, before pickup in June.

We’ve had the feedout available since 1981 to allow producers to learn what kind of cattle they’re really producing. If you’ve been putting this opportunity off hoping some nice buyer of your calves will send you a closeout on the calves he bought from you, you’re just not going to have that happen. Some of our feedout participants have less than 100-cow herds and their consistent use of the feedout has helped them build a desirable reputation. It can work for you, it takes time and marketing effort.

**WEIGHTY QUESTION**
We’re pretty well through the major portion of our winter-early spring calving season. I keep hearing folks say their calves are a lot bigger this year than in the past. So far I don’t have anyone who actually has a good record of birth weights to compare from year-to-year.

With extreme cold weather, University of Nebraska data has noted increased birth weights compared to a normal, whatever normal is in Nebraska winters. It’s been cold here of late and there were some cold spells in December so maybe that’s why it’s happened but beyond that I don’t have a good answer.

I was asked recently about big calves and the fact that this family had bought a young bull two years ago and his first crop of calves came easily and weren’t big. However, this calving season they’re having much bigger calves out of the same bull. The question was, is it because the bull was older? I assured them the bull age had nothing to do with larger calves.

As we visited, the folks answered their own question. The first calves out of the young bull were born in late summer-early fall. Those first-calf heifers were held back a few months and are just now calving so I’m not surprised at the larger calves and it has nothing to do with the age of the sire. Fall-born calves typically weigh less at birth than the winter calves. Weights can vary but the difference often is 5 to 10 pounds.

**RENTAL RATES**
Extension centers receive lots of questions about rental rates for pastures. The University of Missouri Extension folks in Columbia conduct a survey every 2 or 3 years to get a feel for what the going rate is around the state. They plan another survey in 2015. If you’d be willing to respond to the survey please let our office know and you can have input. I am guessing the rent rates on pasture and hay land will be several dollars higher when the 2015 data comes in.