

## Production and Management Tips for Beef Producers

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### **GRAZING SCHOOL SIGNUP**

We're accepting signups now for the May 8, 9 and 10 grazing school at the University of Missouri's Southwest Research Center, Mt. Vernon. We do have a limit on attendance so register by May 1, 2018. You can find more details online or call my office at 417-466-3102.

The schools have a variety of students ranging from persons just starting out in farming, to veterans who might be looking for better, modern technology practices. Who said you can't teach an old dog new tricks?

One of the favorite type of students I find exciting is a younger, technology-wise, innovative or early adopter type. They might be moving into a family farm that's been handed down. They may just be working an off-farm job, have a few acres with a desire to grow into a fulltime livestock producer.

A lot of farmers and others worry about where the farmers of the future will come from. I'm not concerned at all. Realistically, we don't need as many farmers as we used to. There are a lot of young men and women who are just waiting for a break or two and maybe an older farmer who would love to mentor them. Some of these situations can even result into the mentor giving them a break on land acquisition.

### **FEEDOUT 2018**

We've just finished putting the Missouri Steer Feedout brochure together for steer calves born after July 1, 2017. Entry deadline is May 10 with actual delivery to a southwest Iowa feedlot on June 5. Contact my office if you need an entry form. You may also go online to get details at <http://extension.missouri.edu/lawrence/livestock.aspx>.

Even though the feedout has been around since 1981, interest in it has increased the last few years. There's good reason to try and discover what post-weaning performance your cattle possess. If it's good you can use that to enhance

the marketing/price of your calves. Give the feedout a try with at least 5 of your average calves.

If you send a fair representation of your herd and they perform above average, their herdmates should receive a few more bids when they sell. The secret is how you approach notifying your market representative well ahead of sale day that your calves have performed well. Order buyers are always looking for above average cattle, but they want documentation.

### **COW NUMBERS**

The 2018 beef cow inventory showed that Missouri had the third largest number of beef cows added the last year following South Dakota and Texas compared to one year earlier. This permitted us to regain the second largest beef cow state rank. Of course, Texas remains number one.

### **BROOM SEDGE**

Broom sedge, also known as "sage grass" always seems more evident this time of year. If you're noticing it in your pastures or hay fields it's time to take a soil test. Chances are pretty good the results will reveal you have low phosphorus and soil pH levels. It's also likely you've lost some of the stand of desired forages in those fields.

Soil testing is still one of the most valuable investments you can make. Extension provides a soil testing service through each office. The cost varies somewhat but usually is around \$20 per sample for the basic test. A sample should be taken from the soil surface to about 5 or 6 inches in depth in a number of different spots in the field. Collect these random samples from 15 or 20 locations then mix them up and bring about a pint to a pint and a half of the mixed soil to the extension office. Most of our offices or your NRCS offices will loan a soil tube or auger to make sampling a little easier. Please keep the rocks and vegetation out of the submitted sample.

I usually figure a turn around time of 10 or so days to

receive the results. A regional agronomy specialist will make the lime and fertilizer recommendations. It is money well-invested.

### **BAD HOOVES – WHOSE FAULT?**

I was asked recently why bulls' hooves grow out and may result in culling an otherwise good and expensive bull. As with most traits in beef breeding, it's a combination of genetics, environment and the interaction of the two.

A recent Kansas State study of Red Angus indicated the feet and leg traits are moderately to lowly heritable. However, they pointed out that animals can still be selected on traits for improved soundness. At this time evaluation is strictly a subjective measure. The Angus breed is gathering data on toe structure and hoof angle with plans to develop an EPD, (expected progeny difference).

I've been very aware for years of the problem of long, curved, unsound hooves. My observations certainly lead me to believe there are breed and within breed variations. Nutrition, pen and pasture conditions influence the problem.

Pushing bulls for maximum growth surely exaggerates the problem but for years that was the accepted way to accurately evaluate a bull for feed intake and genetic growth potential. As EPDs and genomic testing have evolved it is a better way to evaluate growth as compared to shear average daily gain or yearling weight.

Of course, I know the bull buyer on the seats or in the pen loves the biggest, perhaps the fattest bull. Also, the bulls may be displayed in a muddy lot or in a shavings-type setting so you, the buyer, can not accurately see hoof shape and pastern angle.

So when it's all added up both the buyer, seller, show ring, even extension specialist can share in the blame. I'm hopeful all of us can help correct the dilemma which results in many bulls being culled before their good genetic traits are expressed. I promise to do my part.

I almost forgot one other contributing factor in long, mishappen hooves, **FESCUE TOXICITY**. This shows up, also in cows, especially in the rear hooves.

### **COMPUTER RECORDS FOR COWS**

The University of Missouri Extension now has available a cow herd record system thanks to extension veterinarian Craig Payne. We've had a few producers around the state do trial runs on it. In this area, Nathan Witt, Purdy has been involved in the tests and seems satisfied with the program.

Let me know if you'd like more information or if you know Nathan, touch base with him.

### **WHOLE HERD REPORTING**

Regardless of what record keeping system you use, pledge to include all cattle in your entries. Simply enough, that's referred to as "whole herd reporting." Some breeds demand that in order to obtain a more accurate, honest picture of your herd. Sorting off bad cattle information dilutes the accuracy. In fact, excluding the poor performers makes the desirable animals have poorer performance values whether it's ratios or EPDs.

### **COMPUTER COW GAME**

Back in February at our annual extension livestock conference, Maria Haag, a doctoral candidate, shared with our group her project. It's designed for youth to develop their "herd" via a computer genetics game. If you'd like to investigate the game you can go to [www.cowgames.fun](http://www.cowgames.fun) She's indicated she'll have to come up with a different name. Be careful, you may get hooked on it.

### **CONVERTING TO NOVEL FESCUE**

During our recent fescue renovation program, Joe Horner, extension beef and dairy economist shared with the group his assessment of the cost versus returns of killing the old Kentucky 31 fescue and replacing it with one of the novel fescue varieties. We continue to see new novels developed and farmers often ask if we think the novels can survive. My stock answer is we've had some of the early developed novels in this area for almost 20 years. They seem to have stood the test of time. One thing I caution folks about, fungus free varieties which contain no fungus do not last. Thus, we do not recommend them.

Joe shared with the group that there are three renovation strategies. They are: a spray-summer smother-spray; spray-winter smother-spray and a spray-no smother (wait) – spray program. He listed the items needed for consideration which are preparation costs, planting costs, idle land and smother crop costs and benefits along with payback.

His summary was based on either a stocking rate of 3, 4 or 5 acres per cow-calf. Here's the summary on the spray-summer smother-spray protocol.

	3 acres/cow	4 acres/cow	5 acres/cow
Conversion cost/cow	\$725.67	\$967.56	\$1209.45
Annual Benefits	\$229.63	\$229.63	\$ 229.63
Payback (years)	3.2	4.2	5.3
Internal rate of return (%)	28	19	12

These figures indicate that conversion away from the "hot" fescue is doable.