STILL ROOM AT GRAZING SCHOOLS
There’s still time to register for the three-day grazing school at the Southwest Center, Mt. Vernon on May 10, 11 and 12. Registrations should be in by April 29. A similar grazing school is set for May 23, 24 and 25 at Ozark. Deadline for entering is May 13. Call 417-581-2719, ext. 3. The Newton, McDonald grazing school is June 7, 8 and 9 at the ag building on the Crowder College campus. Register by June 1. For details please call 317-451-1007, ext. 3.

ANOTHER DEADLINE
May 10 is the deadline for entering steers in the Missouri Steer Feedout. I understand why folks do not wish to send steers to Iowa on the retained ownership program but it provides marketing clout if you have the right kind of cattle.

A producer, Darrel Franson, Mt. Vernon passed along an example of how a cow herd owner in Oklahoma utilized data on his set of steers on Superior Livestock Auction’s feeder sale earlier in April. The OK owner apparently had retained ownership on some of his calves and had data supporting their feedlot and carcass performance. There is a program called Reputation Feeder Cattle (RFC) developed by Verified Beef LLC.

Cattle are verified as qualifiers for the RFC label if supported by actual data. The areas that are critical are: % grading Choice or higher; superior ribeye size, superior daily gain and above average yield grade. This data is predicted based on EPDs. They even predict the profit potential compared to the industry’s average genetics.

The disclaimer from RFC is they do not guarantee the actual performance of the cattle as it will vary based on environmental and management differences along with market conditions. The RFC does calculate a genetic merit relative score. This particular set of 96 Angus steers were to have $149.75 more profit per head potential than cattle with industry average genetics.

This is a novel way to utilize data. I encourage all of you who do some higher tech things with your beef calves to be innovative and let others know what your program is and why you might have above average performing cattle. But, don’t just say it without data, you must have facts. The Steer Feedout helps gather those facts.

330 HEAD OF SMS HEIFERS TO SELL
There’s a nice consignment of 330, mostly black and black whiteface bred heifers in our Show-Me-Select sale at Joplin Regional Stockyards on May 20, 7 pm. The heifers are from 20 different farms and most have been in previous sales.

Our SMS consignors have learned that selling breeding stock in a value-added market is a good bit different than selling feeder cattle. With the heifers they are learning to market their product. With marketing comes trying to keep the customer happy and promoting their product. When you attend our sale on the 20th take time to go through the pens ahead of the sale and see the way the 20 farms work at marketing their heifers.

As one of our state specialists said just ahead of our very first SMS sale in 1997, “this isn’t just another bred heifer sale.” A lot of work, both physical and paper type is involved in making this sale a success. Yes, the heifers usually sell well, especially those that have the genetic merit, the appearance and their owner’s reputation behind them.

UPDATE ON LAST MONTH’S DEAL
I had eight responses from readers of last month’s newsletter asking for volunteers on a hair shedding study. A couple of herds have bowed out. There’s still time to participate and I know more details now.

- Must have 10 or more head
- Registered animals are preferred
- No Brahman influence
• Individual weaning weights must be obtained and sent to breed association each year
• Animals must be one year of age or older
• The project title is “Genomic Analysis of Hair Shedding.”
• The owner/herd should still be around in 3 years

The objectives are:
• Identify DNA variants responsible for regional genetic adaptation.
• Create geographic region – specific genomic predictions
• Educate the next generation of beef producers to fully embrace and properly use animal breeding tools.

FESCUE MANAGEMENT
We’ve encouraged farmers to cut their fescue for hay before May 10 for years. By cutting at that time you accomplish several things. Cutting early increase the quality of hay in energy (total digestible nutrients) and crude protein. The level of toxins should be reduced if cutting is done in the boot or very early heading stage.

Tonnage of the early-cut hay will be less than if you wait 2 weeks when the forage contains a higher level of stems. The regrowth will also be high quality and you should find the second cutting outstanding in feed value. A lot depends on rainfall and amount of legumes in the fescue.

Watch the moisture level closely in all forages. If you don’t have a moisture tester why not invest in one? Recommendations are to have the moisture down around 18% or below for large hay packages. If you use a small rectangular baler, push the moisture level up a bit to 20%. Damp hay results in excessive heating, loss of nutrient value, mold formation, waste when feeding and the risk of a fire. Besides using a moisture tester, investing in a hay thermometer is advised.

The removal of fescue seedheads also helps reduce the threat of ergot development in the seed-head. Ergot is extremely toxic when eaten by cattle and the end result is more severe regarding heat stress than the basic fescue toxin, ergovaline.

BUY ALFALFA IN SEASON
Have you ever fed alfalfa hay to beef cattle? Not everyone can afford or has the resources to grow alfalfa for hay. Consider this year, buying some alfalfa hay. Store it wisely and use it as a supplement next hay-feeding season. You’ll be pleasantly surprised at your cattle’s performance. Remember, we do grow good alfalfa around southwest Missouri based on lab tests form they hay shows and other alfalfa test results that are shared with me.

More and more alfalfa baleage will appear on the market. Don’t be afraid of it as it’s probably going to test higher than dry alfalfa hay. The 50%-± alfalfa baleage you’ll find the cattle love it. I do caution that just because it’s in a wrapped form you still need to test it. Some folks may rush it and end up with very wet, 60-70% moisture, haylage and that’ s not desirable. Also wrapped haylage doesn’t have as long a shelf-life as dry hay.

After you acquire the haylage, keep the integrity of forage by preventing rodent and other varmint and human damage to the wrap. Duct tape is not a good item to patch holes with. There is special tape for the plastic.

ALFALFA BALEAGE AS A CREEP
For years I’ve been impressed with the responses seen when fall-born calves are creep fed alfalfa hay. This winter a trial was run at the Southwest Center using alfalfa baleage as the creep diet. I don’t have the official results yet but just observations tell me some of you might want to give it a try. The intake was about 10 lbs. per day at the end which should be around 5 lbs. of dry matter per calf. As soon as I get the results I’ll share them with you.

POINTS TO PONDER
Wesley Tucker, regional extension ag business specialist at Bolivar handed out a lot of good points earlier this month when he spoke at the Christian County Livestock Forage Conference. His topic was transitioning farms from one generation to the next. Here are some of his quotes.

• If you plan to bring the next generation into your operation you need to swallow your pride and allow the next generation to make decisions.

• If you don’t have a family member to take over the farm look around for a neighbor, who may not be related, who might be a good successor to your farm.

• Before getting into a partnership or long-term lease with someone, you should have at least a year of working together, perhaps for a salary, just to see if the two (or more) of you can get along. A two-year relationship might even be better.