

Production and Management Tips for Beef Producers

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THE WEATHER

Yes, the weather is the highlight topic this month. It possibly could take a turn for the better, at least hopefully moisture will allow for fall growth of fescue for stockpiling. Folks from northern and western states envy Missouri due to the fall stockpiling opportunities with fescue. Stockpiling can be done with both Kentucky 31 with toxin producing capabilities or with novel or non-toxin producing varieties.

As you consider options for toughing out the current dry, hot spell, preparation for stockpiling should be right at the top of your list. Other options may be drilling in cereal rye, turnips, radishes or wheat to your existing pasture. Year-in and year-out, topdressing a good stand of fescue with 40 to 60 pounds of nitrogen is hard to beat. Yes, we must have rain but it also takes rain for these other plantings.

BUY HAY OR SELL COWS

I overheard a conversation between two fellows who obviously owned cow herds. One said "I'm not going to pay \$60 for a bale of hay, I'm selling my cows." The other nodded in agreement. There were a few questions I'd have loved to ask them but refrained. Yes, I'm hearing of \$60 plus big bales selling. What did those bales weigh? 800 pounds? 1000 pounds? 1200 pounds? What variety of hay was it and was it put up at the proper stage of growth?

Unfortunately, there isn't much hay that's not already got a home right where it was raised. More than ever this year buy hay with knowledge of it's weight and nutritional value. That means weigh a sample few bales and have a \$20 or so forage analysis run on it.

Finally, there are always some cows in even the best herds, that need a one-way ticket to the yards. They're described as "O-O-O" cows, Old, Open and Ornery! This year having a veterinarian help with your cow herd assessment is more important than ever. Cows that calved the first 4 or 5

months of the year should be preg checked as soon as you can. While the vet's at work behind and inside the cow check the other end for sound mouths. Someone should check udders and hooves. These two areas will likely reveal cows that have outlived their usefulness on progressive beef cow operations.

WEANING WEIGHTS

One of the factors that enticed me to make extension livestock work my career was weighing cattle at weaning and yearling time. Those weights are probably the best indicators of genetic and management design of a cow herd whether a purebred seedstock or commercial beef cow herd. When done regularly, year-after-year, you can compare years, weather effects, genetic selection and so much more.

I don't help with the actual weighing as much as I used to because many of you do it on your own. The breed associations have come around to requiring it in some cases before an animal can be registered. From this data you have a great genetic selection tool, Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs). Now, we also have DNA/genomic testing to help make breeding stock selections.

Most of you reading this letter ear tag calves at birth. Your cows' ear tags correspond in some way to your calves number. Since you've done this much work, I encourage you to take time to weigh your calves individually this fall and figure out a 205 day weight on all of your calves. That includes the biggest, the best and yes, be sure to weigh the dinks.

After you have the birth dates, weights and sex of the calves have someone help you calculate a 205 day weight. This is a standard age we have used for weaning weights since the 50's. Actually, Missouri Extension used 210 days for a while but finally converted to 205 days, which was in use by the Beef Improvement Federation.

Quickly, here's the math used for the 205 day weights. Calculate the days of age at calf weighing. As a rule, we try to collect this weight between 160 and 250 days.

Most of you do not weigh calves at birth but if you do, subtract the birth weight from the actual weaning weight (WW). The standard BIF birth wt. is 75 for bulls and 70 lbs. for heifers. Divide the actual WW minus BW by the days of age at weighing time. Multiply the resulting figure times 205 days then add the calf's birth weight back to that 205 day weight. That gives you the calf's 205 day weight.

Adjustments for age of cow can be made as well as sex of calf but for our simple system, I just suggest you make comparison within the sex group. That means you're comparing cows that raised a steer against other cows that had a steer calf.

The plain old 205 day weight described above gives you a yardstick to make a more valid comparison within your herd and under your management. Don't compare cows whose calves ran to a creep feeder to those that did not have access to creep rations. If the cows were equal, it might tell you a bit about the economics of creep feeding. If some of your pastures were novel fescue and other hot Kentucky 31, evaluating cows for productivity would be interesting.

This use of a standardized 205 day weight is most helpful. This summer I helped a herd calculate 205 day weights and it opened some eyes as the average was only 461 pounds on 90 steer and heifer calves. I did not give an age of dam adjustment, had I done that the adjusted value would have been closer to 480-490 pounds. Still I know of comparable herds under similar forage and management plans that push the 600 pound level as a calf crop 205 day average.

A scale is an extremely valuable tool you should be using if you or your next generation of family members plan to remain competitive in the cattle business. In conclusion, ear tags on all cows and calves, birth dates, actual individual weaning weights and simple calculations will give you an objective measurement that can aid in breeding, feeding and management decisions.

MORE OBJECTIVE DATA

We concluded the 2017-18 Missouri Steer Feedout with the Finale in late June. This year, the 203 steers that were fed together at a lot in Iowa averaged losing \$38.69 per head during the feeding phase. The range went from a profit of \$195.11 to a loss of \$368.04 per head. The big loss

occurred because of death of one steer out of five head in that group.

There were seven groups of steers that generated a profit in Iowa. They did so thanks to above average daily gains and their carcasses, for the most part received premiums for Quality Grade and Yield Grades on the rail. They did not have any discounts on their carcasses.

Producers who consistently score well in the feedouts have the ammunition to promote their herd's genetics whether they're selling breeding stock or feeder calves. Feeder cattle buyers take note of good performing cattle more than they used to. How about giving the next feedout a try? Entries will be due October 10.

Frank Knight, Eminence was in a few feedouts in the past. Last fall, Frank asked if he could put his entire calf crop in the program, both steers and heifers. They ended up in a feedyard two or three miles from our steers but were managed by the same folks and fed the same rations as ours. For comparison I lumped his 36 steers together and his average daily gain was 4.03 pounds. Ninety-seven percent made Choice with no deaths. Those steers averaged \$155.58 profit. He had 61 percent qualify for Certified Angus Beef or made Prime minus.

I'm not sure if Frank will do the same this fall and send them all on retained ownership or if he'll sell at an auction. If the latter, I'll bet he let's his marketer know how his steers and heifers performed.

CATTLE NUMBERS

The 2018 census numbers may not be completely accurate here in July due to a lot of cows going to market but here are some interesting stats.

Missouri ranks number two in beef cows. County rankings in the state for cows are:

1 – Lawrence	56,000
2 – Polk	51,000
3 – Barry	48,000
7 – Newton	41,500
11 – Dade	36,000
16 – Greene	35,000.

The total cattle count shows Lawrence first with 130,000 head; Polk second with 110,000 head; Newton third with 95,000 cattle. On the national scene Lawrence is 21st in beef cows per county, Polk is 35th and Barry comes in at 43rd.