

Production and Management Tips for Beef Producers

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TOO MANY BULLS

The March, Performance Tested Bull Sale at the Springfield Livestock Marketing Center was not a good night for sellers. On the other hand, buyers picked up some bargains. The floor price was \$2000 and several bulls were taken on one bid. There were 11 bulls that did not get off the floor.

The average price on 30 bulls that sold was \$2903. I compare the bull price average to the value of a 450 pound, Medium and Large Frame, 1 and 2 muscle steer the week of the bull sale. Based on the prices at Springfield and Joplin the last week of March, the ratio was 3.6 calves to the value of one tested bull at the sale.

Over the 93 sale history the average has been right at 4:1. The 3.6:1 ratio is not terribly bad, but the 11 no-sales is a bit troubling. Most people I've visited with blame the large number of bulls being offered for sale in southwest Missouri since January 1. Some of those sales did sell some fairly high-priced bulls but you can never tell if they really sold for that.

The tested bull sale does have a long history of repeat buyers who come expecting to buy well-above average bulls when it comes to the "numbers." A bull that is around average may not have very many friends. It may be time for below average bulls to become nice steers.

Just something to think about now. Lawrence county has around 50,000 beef cows that need natural service bull power annually. The number of cows per bull, even with AI, and split calving seasons, probably is about 35:1. Those numbers tell me we need between 1250 to 1500 bulls per year. We have a high number of cows in the greater southwest Missouri area so it's not surprising lots of bulls come this way. If you're a bull buyer, let bull sellers who bring bulls from a long distance to this area know they should not bring below average bulls expecting good prices. The bottom line is, seedstock breeders need to be using the knife more on those bull calves and the sooner the better. Genomic testing at an early age can help them do some sorting before weaning.

IN YOUR SPARE TIME

Well maybe you don't have spare time but when you're working cattle, especially cows, in the next month consider giving them a hair score. Remember, the scoring system is 1 to 5 with 1 being a slick, completely shed off animal. A 5 is the exact opposite with it's winter coat still on.

A 2 score is for animals that are 75% shed, a 3 is 50% shed and 4's are only 25% shed. Why should you go to the trouble of doing the scoring? Research shows that early shedders wean off heavier calves. In fact around 14 lbs. heavier for each point decrease in hair score. For instance a 1 compared to a 3 could result in 25 to 30 lbs. heavier calf for the early shedders.

The data show the heritability of hair shedding ranges from 0.38 to 0.40. That's comparable to weaning weight heritability so genetic improvement can be made when selecting for early shedding.

We don't have an EPD for hair shedding yet, but we will one of these days. It will help reduce problems with fescue toxicosis and heat stress. Besides the weaning weight improvement with early shedders, it may help pregnancy rates even more. Hot cows can lose a pregnancy and that's likely what happened a year ago when May and early June were unusually warm. Let's hope we don't have a repeat of that weather in 2019.

SHOW-ME-SELECT SALE

The Show-Me-Select bred heifer sale is May 17, 7 pm at Joplin Regional Stockyards, near Carthage. There are 260 heifers catalogued. About 75% are black or black baldies. There are several new consignors to go along with some who have consigned to 10 or more sales.

You may contact our office for a catalog or go online at www.swmobcia.com or <http://extension.missouri.edu/lawrence/>

The SMS program tries to take as much guesswork out of buying replacement heifers as it can. All heifers have been under a strict immunization program including vaccination for Brucellosis, tested for BVD-PI and found to be negative. They've been pelvic measured and have met those

requirements. Of course they've been bred naturally or by AI to calving ease bulls.

Our long-time calving assist rate is right around 10% needing some help. Most of the time it's due to a malpresentation. On the fall-calving heifers the assist rate is even lower than 10%, probably closer to 5% due to lighter birth weights.

The sale will not be online this time. If you're thinking of buying you'll need to be on the seats for the sale or send someone to do your bidding. I encourage you to attend and see how the consignors have used technology to add value to their consignments. Perhaps you should consider putting heifers in the program as we're always looking for good heifers.

SEXED SEMEN

In 2017 Philip Brooks, Exeter agreed to do a field trial for folks from the University of Missouri, led by Jordan Thomas, state beef reproduction specialist. At the time Philip thought it was a good deal. He wanted heifers and now as he nears weaning time he's wondering what he's going to do with all those heifers?

I told him he might decide to enter them in the Show-Me-Select project his fall. The heifers are very nice so you may wish to check with him if you're in the expansion mode.

The sex sorted semen runs around 1½ to 2 times higher in price and the pregnancy rate from it runs around 8% less than conventional, non-sorted semen. Jordan has run several trials and he says the sorting process damages the sperm to some degree. He points out that the timing of AI with sorted semen and ovulation is critical. He adds there appears to be bull differences in the sorting process but exactly why is not clear yet.

The University's Southwest Center last December used sex sorted semen in order to make more rapid progress on expanding their herd. The cows and heifers were preg checked and the results pleased Jordan.

NOVEL FESCUE THOUGHTS

The one-day fescue renovation school here at Mt. Vernon in March had a nice turnout. Even though we've had these schools several years it's amazing how there are so many persons show up who are just hearing about fescue toxicosis, ergovaline, fescue foot, etc. for the first time.

A few comments made by the speakers are worth sharing with you. Matt Poore, extension specialist from North Carolina said it's less expensive to renovate fescue for the novels here in Missouri than back east. Matt suggests converting your hay fields before working the pastures. The biggest benefit comes from converting the first 25%, then use that strategically when toxic Kentucky 31 is most likely to cause heat stress in your cattle.

Craig Roberts, University of Missouri Extension specialist pointed out the nutritional value of Ky31 and the novels are similar. He said alfalfa is harder to manage than a novel fescue field.

A couple of different speakers mentioned we should try not to feed toxins to our animals. Along those lines, Darrel Franson, said it's possible we should promote novel fescues for it's benefit to the environment.

Bart Snyder, manager of Kisse Ranch, Mt. Vernon has been converting Ky31 to a variety of novels since 2013. He said he likes them as he can push the nitrogen to his novels without fear of more toxic problems. An observation he shared is he's seeing less annoying respiratory problems with his calves at weaning. He thinks his cows are in better shape as they age so their longevity will keep them around longer.

Finally, a popular question that came up is, "how long will it take me to get my money back?" Joe Horner, MU Extension economist ran the numbers using various scenarios. They included only renovating 25% of the "hot" fescue to 100% replacement. The average time to get your money back in Missouri was 4.7 years. If you only converted 25% the payback time was about 2 years.

You need good records on your pastures and your cows to help decide if and how much of your Ky31 needs renovating as the cost per acre will run \$200 and over. If you choose not to renovate perhaps your best remedy is to go to a fall-calving program.

The producer panel that gave their thoughts at the end of the workshop included David Carrier, Lockwood. He was an early user of the novels around 23 years ago. He probably surprised many when he said that Ky31 still has been very profitable to him. Those profits come from fall-winter stockpiling, a seed crop, hay crop following seed harvest and it's durable when managed properly.

One point several speakers made during the day is that fescue containing the novel endophyte **is not** fungus free. The latter will not survive heat, drought, disease, insects and overgrazing like Ky31 and the fescues with the novel fungus in them.

As May approaches, make an effort to control seedheads in fescue. Get as much fescue hay put up by mid-May as possible. Fescue does work as baleage if you're set up to handle it.