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CHRISTIAN COUNTY LIVESTOCK & FORAGE CONFERENCE

The date for the above event is March 5 beginning at 5:30 pm at the Clever High School Commons Center. Speakers and topics include Farm Liability Insurance, Dr. Ray Massey, State Ag Business Specialist; Dr. Scott Pooch, State Extension Veterinarian will explain how to give assistance to the cow and calf at calving; Tips for Forage Establishment is Tim Schnakeberg's topic, he's our field specialist in agronomy in Galena. Registration is due February 28 to reserve your meal. There is no fee. Call 417-581-3558.

LET'S TALK FORAGES

I'd like to visit a bit about forage observations this winter. We grow forages in the warm months but there's a lot of things you don't observe in the summer that deserve your attention in January, February and March. By-the-way, I'm not Tim Schnakenberg, field specialist in agronomy, but I'll bet he'd echo some, if not all, of these bullet points.

- If you've never attended the Novel Tall Fescue Renovation Workshop plan to do so on March 24 or 25. The 24th event is at Harrison, AR and on the 25th it is at the Southwest Center, Mt. Vernon. These are day-long events from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. At it, you'll hear about fescue toxicosis, how to identify it, it's money and performance losing problems, how to establish it and topics from researchers and producers on managing it whether you convert to a novel variety or some other less toxic forage. You don't have to convert all of your Kentucky-31 fields to see a response, just 25 to 30% conversion can help a bunch.
- Do you test your soil regularly? Poultry litter has been used extensively since the 1990's but many still use a 3-1-2 ratio fertilizer. Test your soil to determine what your forage really needs. I'd almost bet the results won't call for a 3-1-2. Just because a 3-1-2 was what dad or grandpa used doesn't mean it's what your pastures or hay crop need.

- Are you seeing lots of brown or tan forage in pastures and hay fields this winter? It's broom sedge or sage grass and is a bad, invasive pasture weed when phosphorus and lime are needed. Take note as you drive down the roads how much broom sedge there is. If broom sedge is there it means you don't have a healthy stand of desirable forage.
- Attend a management-intensive grazing school if you've never attended one. They are especially useful for new land owners. Seven of these three-day schools are offered this year. The one at the University's Southwest Research Center, Mt. Vernon is May 5, 6 and 7. Call me or the Southwest Center 417-466-2148 for details.
- Have you tested any of your 2019 hay crop through a lab? There has been some cow deaths in the region and nitrates and low quality were blamed. Tests were basically inconclusive as to whether the hay was the smoking gun that caused the deaths and abortions. The limited number of hay samples did reveal some terribly poor hay. The two that I saw results on had crude protein on a dry basis of 4.8% and 5.4%. The TDN values were 48.5% and 49.2%. Perhaps more revealing, the neutral detergent fiber levels were 68.8% and 73.3%. Neutral detergent fiber (NDF) values are used to estimate dry matter intake. Thus, when you combine those three items there's no doubt the animals couldn't consume enough of those hays to allow them to perform adequately. Could they flat-out kill an animal or result in an abortion? That's still debatable.

ITEMS FROM THE MONETT CONFERENCE

There seemed to be lots of interest in our, what's it cost to keep a beef cow for a year topic. Three cow-calf producers, Nathan Isackson, Weaver Forest and Cherry Warren gave their best calculations. Nathan's value was \$589. Weaver's was \$900 per calf sold. Cherry said, \$725 with depreciation.

The three operations varied in size, length of time in the business, whether they bought or made most of the hay.

In other words, each operation needs to keep adequate records and analyze them annually to determine their profitability. Several comments the panelists made were:

- I cull a lot of cows, mostly because of bad feet.
- I try to follow Management intensive Grazing practices and 10 acre pastures are too big.
- I charge an opportunity cost for pasture rent of \$40 per acre annually and I figure 3 acres per cow.
- Testing hay is my best investment, I buy most of my hay.
- I invest in insurance on my hay and pasture.
- Fescue has saved me over the years and I now buy and feed anhydrous ammonia-treated hay.
- You can't afford to not pre-condition feeder calves.
- Do you charge your cows for your smart phone?

HUMAN AND CATTLE FEED WASTE

I never stopped to think about the similarity between human cattle feed waste until Dr. Bryon Wiegand mentioned at Monett that we need to eat the food we're served and we should have plenty of food in the future. He said we waste about 40% of it. A few days later in a pork magazine I read that in the United States, between 30 and 40% of the food produced is wasted. That's equivalent to about one meal per person per day.

Now, let's look at our cattle forage waste. It's not uncommon to hear references to the forage waste to be in the 30 to 40% range. This is certainly true this winter as muddy conditions in the bale yard and feeding area easily gets close to the 30% level.

MONETT VETERINARIAN PANEL

I asked Drs. Voyd Brown, Cassville, Darren Loula, Clever and Ted Dahlstrom, Monett to discuss the major beef health issues in their clientele's herd's year-in and year-out. The first condition out of their mouths was pink eye. That subject took up a good bit of their time so each had some good comments.

The consensus was you need to sit down with your veterinarian and develop a pink eye plan as to what vaccine to use, when to give it, how to give it. They agreed there are several causes of the eye problem so it's important to do culturing to identify the cause on your place. Autogenous vaccines can be a big help but they need to be boosted. If you can't get them up to booster, consider the implant treatment. They recommended fly tags or some other effective fly preventive program.

A couple of other comments I liked were:

- ✓ Be on the alert for hairy heel warts.
- ✓ If you're losing calves have your vet cut them open.
- ✓ Don't keep open cows.
- ✓ Pregnancy test early.
- ✓ Preconditioning almost always pays if you provide details to your marketer. It just may not pay as much as you'd want.
- ✓ Castrate bulls early, before 3 months.
- ✓ Wean at least 45 days prior to your sale date. The markets now report short-weaned calves prices and they take a price hit.

BEEF PRICE OUTLOOK

Scott Brown, University of Missouri Extension beef economist shined up his crystal ball for the Stone County Beef Forage Conference and he's very optimistic about 2020 prices. In a nutshell, he said all cattle prices should be higher in 2020. About every other statement he made referenced China trade, African Swine Fever or corona virus.

One other point he stressed is, consumers both here and abroad, now want high quality beef not the Select grade which has only a slight degree of marbling.

BACKGROUNDING OR STOCKER BUDGET

There are quite a few cow-calf folks who have sold their cows and gone to a stocker program which isn't as confining as the cow.

The assumption used are to buy a 590 lb. steer and sell them at 815 lbs. Most of the stockers start at a lighter weight. Most carry the steers to 800 to 900 lbs. Using the MU budget they figure an average daily gain of 1.76 lbs. which sounds about right if part of the time they're on "hot" fescue. Most stocker operators feed some supplement in order to get decent gains. I figure the energy supplement is surely needed if they target gaining 2 pounds or better. Steer gains normally are better the first 6 months of the year than in the last 6 months. Use a growth promoting implant and an ionophore in the supplement.

The labor figure used is 1.5 hours per steer. Once again, we value your labor as management too so it's set at \$14.97 per hour. That may seem too high on labor but if you buy the stockers yourself think of the hours you ring up at auctions just waiting for a nice package to come through the ring.