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REMINDER

If you've not signed up to continue receiving this monthly newsletter we need to hear from you by February 1. Last month's letter contained a short survey to return and we've had a good response from that. Thanks for a quick reply.

STOCKER CATTLE MEETING

There's a virtual, two-night beef conference set for February 16 and 18 beginning at 7 pm both evenings. The topics and speakers are:

- Nutrition and Health Management of Stocker Cattle – Dr. Eric Bailey, MU Extension
- Low Input Heifer Development That Produces Profitable Open Feeder Heifers – Dr. Jordan Thomas, MU Extension
- Economics of a Stocker Operation and COVID-19 Considerations – Wesley Tucker, MU Extension

There is no charge but you must register by February 15 at <https://extension.missouri.edu/events/online-southwest-missouri-mu-extension-beef-cattle-conference>

For other questions contact Patrick Davis at 417-276-3313 or email davismp@missouri.edu

SW CENTER HEIFER PROJECT

I'm pleased to report the residual feed intake (RFI) project at the Southwest Research Center has 77 heifers eating from the GrowSafe feed bunks. They arrived the week of January 4 and come from 6 different farms. They'll officially be "on-test" for 42 days and will go home in early March to be bred in late April and May.

The RFI data will reveal the heifer's actual feed intake, compared to predictions of feed intake. The bottom line is the participants will learn how their heifers compare to herd mates as well as to heifers from other farms.

I've had questions about when we planned to start another group of heifers. Right now we are concentrating on seeing how it all plays out on these. We anticipate it will all go as planned and the participants will be happy. We should be

able to do another 80 head starting in early August and conclude in early October. The targeted ages would be for heifers born after July 1, 2020.

We have a concern about that time period as heat could present some issues. There is some shade and we have fed cattle from the University's own herd in the heat of the summer in the past. If you'd like to be added to the prospect list, let the folks at the Southwest Center know.

THINK LEGUMES

One of the questions on the newsletter survey we sent last month asked how you cope with fescue problems. The main reply was, "use legumes." Well, we're almost in February and that's the prime month to broadcast or no-til pastures or hay fields.

Our fescue pastures have been grazed very close or have thinned out over time so this year should be a good opportunity to add legumes.

The biggest competition the legumes will face is some weeds like buttercup and henbit. Of course, you'll need to have a soil test that indicates your soil pH is high enough for the clovers, red and ladino. That's usually 6.0 or higher. Lespedeza can compete if the soil test falls below 6.0.

Other tips from the agronomy folks are to inoculate the legume seed and don't plant too deep. Getting the seed deeper than ¼ inch is too deep. Do not apply commercial nitrogen or poultry litter in the fields you're trying to get legumes established. Use your soil test as a guide to follow if you're planning to use the field for hay or pasture. For more details, contact the Extension field specialist in agronomy that's in your area.

COLOSTRUM

Are you ready for the calving season that begins in earnest in February? Believe it or not, but colostrum, the first milk

produced by cows and heifers after having a calf can have life-long implications to the calf.

The Meat Animal Research Center in Nebraska conducted a study that rated calf performance from weaning through the feedlot. The calves were divided into those with adequate or inadequate passive immune blood samples at 24 hours of age. Calves with inadequate immunity had 6.4 times greater risk of being sick during the first 28 days of life, a 3.2 times greater risk of being sick prior to weaning and a 5.4 times greater risk of death prior to weaning compared to those rated as having adequate passive transfer. Calves developing sickness during their first 28 days of life had a 35 lb. lower expected weaning weight.

During the finishing phase, the inadequate cattle were three times more likely to get sick in the feedlot. Those with respiratory disease had a .09 lb. lower daily gain during the feeding phase.

The most likely influencers of poor colostrum are calves born to first-calf heifers or those experiencing difficult deliveries. The recommendation is to make sure those heifers are in good body condition scores of 6 or better. They hopefully were bred to calving ease bulls to minimize calving difficulty. Finally, make sure the calf nurses in the first 6 hours after birth. The colostrum should come from the heifer herself or from cows in the herd. If that's not doable, resort to a commercial colostrum product.

THINK INDEXES

Not only does February bring the calving season it brings the bull sale season. There will be new emphasis placed on the merits of buyers looking at more than just birth weights, either as an EPD or actual birth weights. Of course, we've tried to get buyers to think of calving ease EPDs as a more accurate means of picking out a "heifer bull." In regards to that, don't think you need to go to extremes on CED (calving ease direct) as you might reduce growth of the calf. We have good guidelines in the Show-Me-Select Heifer program for bulls with acceptable CED EPDs. Check me if you'd like those guides.

Many breeds now have indexes that combine EPDs into one number which makes a lot of sense compared to just looking at one or two EPDs. The indexes are usually designed to weigh the various EPDs on programs that retain heifers in their own herd, sell everything at weaning, run steers and/or heifers up to a year or retain ownership through to the packer.

These numbers will usually reflect a dollar value and also give you a percentile ranking which easily lets you know if that management protocol is average, above or below for that blend of traits. Let me know if you have questions about, **BUYING BULLS BY THE NUMBERS.**

OLD RESEARCH

Recently, I ran across a fascinating research report from New Mexico State that told about a 1960's study of 200 cows' grazing habits. I know range cows in New Mexico may act differently than southwest Missouri cows on fescue under a management intensive grazing system. Anyway, I'll bet there are similarities so here are excerpts from the research as reported by Don D. Dwyer of NMSU.

- Cattle have well-defined habits and their movements are far from random.
- Cows were individually identified and observed continually during an observation period.
- There were two intense periods of grazing daily from 5 AM to 8 AM and 5 PM to 8 PM. They grazed frantically during each bout and were not easily distracted. Several bites of forage were consumed between each step.
- Cattle often sniffed plants before taking a bite and sometimes they would reject a plant. They depended on three or four species primarily but grazed many different grasses, forbs and shrubs.
- Cattle always preferred tender new growth over more mature plants.
- Cattle grazed in groups of 20 to 30 with each cow following in the general direction of the group.
- There did not seem to be a specific leader, but some bullying was shown around salt boxes.
- The composition of the grazing groups constantly changed. A cow's only constant companion was her calf.
- The cattle never passed up the opportunity to rub themselves on objects such as large rocks and gullies.
- On cool days they grazed 8.7 hours, on hot days 6.65 hours.
- Above 90 degrees respiration rates increased resulting in an increase in energy required which lowered daily gains.
- Rumination occurred during rest periods while standing, lying down and during nursing. Total time was 10.47 hours per day.
- The cattle did not lie down during a rain and always moved with the rain. Too bad there wasn't a tornado during the study as I've always wondered what cattle do when we have tornadoes.
- Cows do not go for over 36 hours without salting. They spent an average of 8.1 minutes when salting but actually only licked salt for 60 or 70 seconds. Young calves only tasted the salt and never seemed to crave it.
- The period of breeding for the cow was marked by considerable running and travel and little grazing while her calf was left with other cows. The bulls traveled a lot at night and estimates were they traveled 6 miles a day.