



UNIVERSITY OF
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EXTENSION

Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

Northeast Florida Beef & Forage Group

Fall 2005 Newsletter



Dear Producers,

It is that time again to begin thinking about your winter feeding programs and herd management. This newsletter visits many topics to help you get through the winter. As extension agents, we try to provide up-to-date topics in a timely manner. We hope that this newsletter, along with NFBFG programs is educational to you and your operation. Please feel free to contact us for more information.

Sincerely,

Cindy Sanders
NFBFG, Chair

Ferrell in his publication which you can download on your personal computer at: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/AG233>.

Thistle: If you had thistles in your pasture this Spring, now is the time to control them with herbicide. Late this Fall (from mid-October through November) control thistle rosettes while they are small with one quart Weedmaster per acre on bahiagrass pastures. Using a crop oil in the spray mix and spraying when temperatures are greater than 50 degrees Fahrenheit helps increase control. If you have a thistle problem and don't spray this Fall you will have to use higher rates (one and a half to two quarts Weedmaster per acre) in early Spring when rosettes are larger but before stalks elongate and flower.

Fall Bahia Pasture Weed Control
Jacque Breman
Union County CED



Dogfennel: If you haven't controlled dogfennel you might want to mow this Fall to prevent seed production and further spread. Spring (April – June) of 2006 is the time to clean your fields up using herbicides and rates listed by Dr.

Tropic Soda Apple: It's getting late but worth the effort to apply Remedy as 1% spray solution to Tropic Soda Apple bushes. Try to apply this as soon as possible. Be sure to use a crop oil and cover the Tropic Soda Apple foliage well with spray. Mowing will not control these aggressive weeds. Tropic Soda Apple is overwintering in Northeast Florida and coming up from the root system in the Spring.

Bull Selection
Cindy Sanders
Alachua County Extension



Selection of your herd bull is a very important task as a cow-calf producer. It has been said that the herd bull is half of the herd, due to the fact that he supplies half of the genetic makeup of the entire calf crop.

Bull selection should be based on genotypic and phenotypic traits. If Expected Progeny Differences are available they should be a priority in selecting bulls. First, evaluate your herd's strengths and weaknesses, for example; weaning weights, milking ability, birth weights, etc. Select which traits need improvement, and make those a priority when looking at the data.

Also, consider accuracy of the data, the more offspring a bull has in production, the greater the accuracy and more reliable the numbers.

Visual selection is important once the bull has met the previous criteria. Structural soundness is essential, muscling and conformation is extremely important. Remember that bigger is not always better! Lastly, consider disposition and attitude.

When buying bulls make sure that the bull has passed a breeding soundness evaluation, and that the breeder is willing to guarantee that he is sound.

Supplementing Winter Feed
David Nistler
Clay County Extension



The most common winter feeds for beef cattle are hay and corn silage. Supplemental feed is often necessary to obtain the most efficient use of these forages. Concentrate feeds such as corn or

SBOM and minerals that are fed in small amounts to improve the utilization of forage and animal performance are referred to as supplements. Supplements are normally added to the ration to correct a deficiency of nutrients such as energy, protein, vitamins or minerals in the feedstuff being fed. Several questions should be considered in determining if a supplement is needed and how much: classification of animal, size and condition, stage of production, level of performance desired, and the nutrient content of the forage.

There are many feedstuffs that may be included in a supplement, or used as a supplement. Corn is an ideal energy supplement but other grains may also be used. Soybean meal or cottonseed meal are the commonly used protein supplements. However, by-product feeds high in energy or protein, such as soy hulls or corn gluten, are also commonly used as supplements. Non-protein nitrogen (NPN) sources, such as urea, may also be utilized in supplements; however, when using NPN sources care should be taken to follow the recommended mixing and feeding procedures.

Producers should provide mineral supplements containing salt, calcium and phosphorus. The Calcium: phosphorus ratio should be maintained at approximately 2.0:1.0. Other minerals that may be required in a mineral supplement are selenium, copper and zinc. Producers may mix their own mineral supplements or there are several companies that provide excellent mineral mixtures for free-choice supplementation. Vitamins are normally not critical with the possible exceptions of vitamin A if poor quality forages are being fed or B-vitamins for stressed or ill cattle.

Even if only a very small quantity of supplement is required to balance a ration, it will most likely make a

tremendous difference in the performance of the cattle fed. When making nutritional decisions, always strive to be practical and cost effective in your decisions.

Managing the Cowherd During Calving Season

**Larry Varnadoe,
Nassau County Extension**



Calving season on a farm or ranch is a very important time as it represents a chance to recoup the cost of maintaining the cow for a year plus make a profit in the end. However, it is estimated that up to 6 % of the annual U.S. calf crop dies at birth or shortly thereafter. The following are some management practices that should help you reduce calving season losses.

Maintain a Short Calving Season.

Knowing when your cows should calve will allow you to devote more time to checking the herd and detecting problems associated with calving.

Separate First-Calf Heifers from Older Cows. Calving difficulty in heifers may run as high as 30 to 40 percent while 3 percent is about normal for mature cows. Heifers should be placed in a small, easily accessible pasture so they can be observed closely. A corral located nearby makes rendering assistance much easier.

Provide a Clean Calving

Environment. Cows should calve in well-sodded pastures or clean, dry maternity pens; avoid muddy lots.

Familiarize Yourself With the Signs of Calving. The udder on most cows will enlarge prior to calving. However, this may begin several weeks before actually giving birth. Several days before calving, the vulva will become swollen, begin to sag and may discharge strings of mucus. A few hours prior to calving, most cows become nervous and wander away from the herd.

Make Frequent Trips to the Pasture (3-4 Times Per Day).

Observation is the key to providing assistance to cows that are experiencing difficult birth.

Know When Assistance is Needed. Mature cows that have been in active labor in excess of one hour and first calf heifers in active labor in excess of two hours may require intervention to complete the calving process. A normal birth presentation is both front feet first followed by the nose. If any of these are not visible or if more than this is visible, it may be wise to seek professional help unless you are experienced with correcting abnormal birth presentations.

Be Sure the Calf Breathes

Normally. Once delivery is complete, stimulation may be necessary to start its breathing. Remove mucus from the calf's nose and throat by gently lifting by the hind legs. Breathing may be started by briskly rubbing the calf, slapping it on the ribs or tickling its nose with a straw.

Be Sure the Calf Consumes

Colostrum. Colostrum (first milk) is a source of antibodies that helps protect newborn calves from disease. Ideally, calves should nurse within 15-30 minutes after birth. If a calf has not received colostrum from its dam in 1-2 hours post-partum, it should be fed a colostrum source either by milking the mother, feeding frozen colostrums or feeding a commercial colostrums supplement.

Increase Feed Post Calving. The energy requirement of the cow will increase greatly when the calf is old enough to consume all her milk (10-14 days after calving). Cows nursing calves should be allotted extra feed to ensure that they produce enough milk for the calf and maintain body condition so they will rebreed on schedule.

**Benefits of Breeding for a
Controlled Calving Season**
Steffany Dragon
Duval County Extension



You may have considered developing a controlled breeding season for your cows an unnecessary complication to your operation. There are a number of reasons why producers feel this way including the common statements:

- “Why give the bull time off instead of getting the most out of him year round?”
- “It’s a lot of trouble to set aside bull pastures for the ‘off-season’.”
- “Letting the bull run with the cows year-round ensures a good calf crop.”
- “It’s better to have a calf at the wrong time of the year than none at all.”
- “I like having calves to sell year round.”

While some of these statements certainly are valid and each producer is entitled to his/her partialities, you might want to consider the following compelling advantages of a controlled calving season:

- **Improved Herd Health Management.**
-Herd health care and management are simplified. It requires much less labor to perform several procedures simultaneously (such as vaccinating, dehorning, castrating, implanting, identifying, deworming, fly control, pregnancy checking and weaning).
-Calves born during the summer months weigh less at weaning and must endure summer heat, insects, internal parasites, and poor pastures.
- **Improved Cow Herd Nutrition**
-Brood cow nutrition is improved.

Winter feeding (one of the major expenses in maintaining a cow herd) cannot be utilized as efficiently when dry cows, lactating cows, and first-calf heifers are wintered together. For example, to better use feed resources, you may only have to feed lactating cows rather than trying to feed both wet and dry cows.

- **Improved Genetics**
-Culling of cows and selection of replacement heifers must be based on performance. Since calves born at different times of the year gain at different rates, a meaningful evaluation of brood cows or replacement heifers requires a relatively short calving period. Basically, relative comparisons are more accurate between calves born within a shorter time span.
- **Improved Marketing**
-A larger, more uniform calf crop in terms of age and weight will receive a premium when sold.

Source: EDIS publication: FL Cow-Calf Management, 2nd Edition

For more information and to learn how to transition to a controlled breeding season, attend the NFBFG Herd Management Workshop, Nov. 15.

**Body Condition Scoring/
Winter Feeding**
Elena Toro

Columbia County Extension



Most of you have probably heard that you need to “score” the body condition of your cattle on a regular basis. Body condition scoring (BCS) of beef cattle can be an effective management tool for evaluating the energy reserves of cows and the whole

nutritional program. Females that are too thin or too fat can be an expensive investment. Thin cows can have difficulty rebreeding, while fat cows are prone to calving problems and excessive feed costs.

Body condition of beef cows is scored from 1 (thin) to 9 (fat). This is a visual scoring system, and so it is expected to vary, but among experienced evaluators condition scores are not likely to vary by more than one score. Keep in mind it is not difficult to evaluate body condition of cattle. A BCS of 5 is considered average and optimal: increased fat over ribs, 12 and 13th ribs are not visible to the eye unless the animal has shrunk. The spine can only be felt with firm pressure to feel rounded and areas on each side of the tail are fairly well filled but not mounded.

Body condition is usually highest in mid to late summer and is lowest in late winter or early spring. The loss of 1 point of BCS represents usually a loss of 75 pounds. Cattle are usually going to lose weight in the winter but it should be gradual and moderate. If a cow can lose 1 point of BCS slowly through a 120 day period instead of 45 days, then it will be easier for her to recover next summer. It is desirable to have cows in BCS 5 or higher at calving however that is not always the case. Separate thin cows and consider grazing thin cows on higher quality pasture first than the rest of the herd and if supplements are needed feed a lower quantity over a longer period of time to get the most response of the supplement.

IFAS has two publications that include pictures and guidelines on body condition scoring that you might find useful, to order a copy contact the IFAS Bookstore in Gainesville at 352-392-1764.

Upcoming Events



October 4, 2005-Bull Selection and Management

Place: Southeastern Semen Company in Wellborn, FL

Time: 6:00 p.m.

November 15, 2005- Herd Health and Winter Supplementation

Place: Bradford County Fairgrounds

Time: 7:00 p.m.

****Please contact your local Extension Agent for more information.**

Newsletter composed by Wendy Burton, Bradford County Extension.