



# BEEF CATTLE TIME

Vol. 27, No. 2

Spring 2009

## Planning for Success in 2009

*Emmit L. Rawls, Professor  
Agricultural Economics*

After a turbulent 15 months, beef producers are anxious about issues regarding production and market plans for 2009. Will the rest of 2009 be close to average? It has not started that way. One of the most predictable price trends in the cattle business is the increase in prices of cull cows from late fall into the first quarter. While prices averaged \$3 to \$4 higher in January and February than in December, they dropped to the mid- to low \$40s in March due to the increase in marketing of dairy cows. It looks certain that there will not be another dairy buyout by the government, but Cooperatives Working Together (CWT) appears to be planning another reduction in milk cows and bred heifers. CWT deducts 10 cents per hundredweight of milk sold, and since 2003 has used the money to pay producers to market dairy cows and bred heifers. Should they conduct the buyout, the number of cows removed could dampen cow prices and other cattle prices, though not to the extent of the mid-1980s government-sponsored buyout.

Though the reduction could come when the beef cattle herd is declining in size (U.S. down 1.6 percent in 2009, Tennessee down 6 percent in 2008 and 2 percent in 2009), the economy's impact on beef demand is something we have not recently experienced. Fed cattle and corn prices are yet to be determined this year, but there will be volatility from weather and outside market influences. Cattle price risk is manageable, even for the smaller producer, with Livestock Risk Protection Insurance (LRP). Feed prices are manageable by buying ahead, forward contracting with a feed supplier, or growing your own.

Producers should have their cattle production directed toward a marketing event. To capture full value of cattle, it should be a marketing event where cattle are grouped into uniform truckloads of 48,000 to 50,000 pounds. UT research has shown that prices are about \$4 per hundred higher when cattle are sold in loads. Check the Tennessee Department of Agriculture Pick Tennessee Products Web site at [www.picktnproducts.org/farm/cattlesales.html](http://www.picktnproducts.org/farm/cattlesales.html) for sale events, and check with your marketing agent as well. With auction receipts down, market operators should be interested in anything to attract additional cattle. Special sales are not available across the state, so hauling might be required. Do your homework, because shrink caused by stress and time away from feed and water is a significant marketing cost. Check the requirements for special sales and perform those management practices to avoid price discounts. Proper castrating, dehorning and especially controlling flies are in the must-do category. There are some Process Verified Program (PVP) sales in which cattle are age and source verified. The producer must be enrolled to participate and have calf records available. Contact your market or Ben Neale with the Tennessee Livestock Network at 615-837-5189 for more information. Some producers like to sell directly from the farm; that is fine if they are satisfied with the price, sort, price slide, weighing conditions, etc. My experience is that one never knows what they would have brought in a competitive if only one buyer bids on the cattle.

When weaning calves for a preconditioned sale, use a reduced-stress method such as fence line where cows and calves can touch noses, or a two-step method where calves have plastic weaning devices applied and are turned back with the cows for about a week. Demonstrations and research by D.B. Haley, et al. have shown that the two-step

method results in significantly less stress and no weight loss when calves were separated from their mothers. The feeding program during post-weaning needs to include some dry feed, the amount depending on the price of feed and cattle, as well as the access to good quality grass.

Retained ownership to a feedlot is a way to find out how your cattle perform in the feedlot and what kind of carcasses they produce. It carries risks from a production and price standpoint. Production risks include sickness and associated costs and possible death loss. Price risk can come from rising feed prices or declining cattle prices after the cattle are sent to a feedlot, such as what occurred in 2008. It is a way to capture a defined premium for age and source verification, at least in the Tennessee Beef Evaluation program where that premium ranges from \$20 to \$35 per head. In this program, we send commingled groups or single ownership groups and make a significant effort to manage the price risk. For further information contact your county Extension agent, Emmit Rawls or Tammy McKinley at 800-345-0561.

## **Safe Transportation of Beef Cattle**

*Clyde Lane Jr.*

*Professor - Animal Science*

Have you ever thought about how important transportation is to the profitability of your beef operation?

Producers spend all year producing a calf crop to market. The calves' value can be severely reduced if they are injured or have excessive shrink during transport. The value of cull animals can also be reduced because of injuries during transport.

A safe truck and trailer for transportation is critical. The truck pulling the trailer must have capacity to safely handle the trailer. Trailers should be kept in good condition and repaired when needed, as maintenance saves time. How long will it take to change a flat tire or repair a wheel bearing that goes out while hauling cattle? Breakdowns can be a headache, but if the trailer is checked out and serviced before loading, these problems can be avoided.

Any trailer used to haul cattle should have a nonslip floor. Many producers use a wire cattle panel to provide traction, which works well as long as the trailer is clean before hauling another load. A thin layer of manure can cover the wire if the trailer is not cleaned. Make sure the wire is secure and use more than the minimum number of staples to hold it. Another option is a rubber mat; however, these also must be washed regularly.

The trailer floor should be inspected and replaced when needed. Sharp edges and holes in the floor can injure cattle. The useful life of a wooden trailer floor is probably less than 10 years; if the trailer is not cleaned regularly, the life expectancy is probably less. Cleaning the trailer will help prevent injuries, assist in biosecurity and help prevent the spread of disease.

Sort cattle into groups before loading. The first sort should be horned and polled. Give cattle with horns more room than the polled cattle, as they can bruise or injure each other. Don't put cows in the same compartment as calves. The amount of room required per animal increases as the size of the animal increases. If hauling bulls that have never been together or have been separated for a considerable time, put them in separate compartments to avoid fighting. When cattle are purchased from separate sources they should be separated in the trailer to prevent them from trying to establish a new social order during hauling.

When closing and opening gates in the trailer, take care to prevent injury. If cattle are overloaded, there can be a great deal of tension on the gates causing the gates to spring toward you when unlatched. Similarly, cattle can hit the gates with the same result.

When loading cattle, move the animals slowly and quietly. Avoiding the use of electric prods and allowing the cattle to establish a flow onto the trailer will help prevent the animals from getting excited and incurring a greater degree of shrink.

Careful driving can prevent bruises, injuries and even death while hauling cattle. Whenever possible, avoid routes and times that have heavy traffic. Watch for traffic from side streets. Before hauling, think about the route that has the least amount of traffic, stops and sharp turns. Gentle acceleration and breaking will also prevent injuries and stress to cattle.

Think about the weather when hauling cattle. Cold and icy conditions are not the only reasons for delaying the transport of animals. Summertime temperatures and high humidity can also be stressful on the animals. The road temperature is usually higher than actual temperature since road surfaces retain heat. Haul cattle in the early morning when the road has had a chance to cool overnight. When hauling in winter, avoid the coldest part of the day – remember that you need to account for wind chill. The worst time to haul cattle is during a cold rain in the winter, which decreases the temperature on wet cattle, causing stress and sickness.

## Warm-Season Annual Grasses for Forage Production

*Dr. Gary Bates, Forage Specialist  
Plant Sciences, UT Extension*

With summer approaching, now is the time for cattle producers to plan for forage production. Tall fescue pastures will begin to slump in growth as the temperatures rise and less rain falls. Warm-season annual grasses offer the opportunity to provide more forage production than what would be available from tall fescue during the summer.

**Warm-season grasses are more efficient.** Cool-season grasses like tall fescue and orchardgrass make energy through photosynthesis that is somewhat inefficient. The end result is the plant loses water during the process. The process also occurs the best when the temperature is in the upper 60s to low 70s. This is why these grasses grow the best during the spring and fall, but don't do well during the summer.

In contrast, warm-season grasses have an additional photosynthetic mechanism that is much more efficient with its water use. It occurs most rapidly when the temperature is in the upper 70s to 80s, which means they are much more adapted to hot, summer conditions. It doesn't mean they are immune to drought. It's that they need less water to produce than tall fescue, and are much better able to survive a prolonged drought without stand loss.

### Should you plant a warm-season annual grass?

Everyone needs a plan for providing forage during the summer drought that seems to be inevitable. Most producers need to have 15 to 30 percent of their land

devoted to this. Warm-season annuals are an option. The UT Forage Variety Testing Program continues to study several different species and varieties of these grasses. Table 1 shows the 2008 data from those tests.

**Crabgrass** – An annual grass that was selected for higher yield from native crabgrass populations in Oklahoma. Research in Oklahoma indicates yield and animal performance are both excellent on this forage. Experience in Tennessee indicates that it can make an excellent pasture for stocker animals during the summer. Because it is an annual, allowing plants to produce seed for the next year's stand is necessary. No information is available to determine how successful natural reseeding of crabgrass will be due to the abundance of native crabgrass seed in Tennessee. There are two varieties currently available: "Red River" and "Quick-N-Big."

**Sorghum x sudangrass hybrid and pearl millet** – Relatively tall-growing grasses that can be productive with timely summer rains. Sorghum x sudangrass hybrids tolerate a cooler soil temperature, so they can be planted earlier than pearl millet. Sorghum x sudangrass hybrids release prussic acid (cyanide) after a frost in fall, so you cannot graze them in the fall as long as you can pearl millet. When there is a potential for even a light frost, do not graze a sorghum x sudangrass hybrid. Only cut it for hay, which will allow time for the prussic acid to break down.

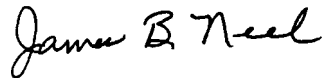
**Teff grass** – Has received a lot of publicity over the last year. It is originally from west Africa. It is a summer annual that has a little finer stem than sorghum x sudangrass, so it should be a little higher in forage quality. Yields may not be quite as high as with sorghum x sudangrass hybrids. Also, early in the season the root

**Table 1. Yield of warm-season annual grasses in Springfield, Tennessee and Crossville, Tennessee during 2008. More variety trial data available at [forages.tennessee.edu](http://forages.tennessee.edu).**

Variety	Species	Springfield, TN	Crossville, TN
		----- lbs DM/acre -----	
Red River	crabgrass	1,544	4,824
Quick-N-Big	crabgrass	5,129	4,136
Promax	sudangrass	9,440*	6,493*
MS202BMR	sorghum x sudangrass	7,501*	5,932*
FSG208BMR	sorghum x sudangrass	8,460*	5,070
Greengrazer	sorghum x sudangrass	6,094	6,900*
Dessie	teffgrass	6,290	4,314
Tiffany	teffgrass	5,810	4,107
LSD (0.05)		2,339	4,107

\* These varieties statistically yielded the same as the top variety.

system is shallow, so be careful with the grazing management. May be better to take first cutting off as hay. The seed is very small, so be careful of seeding depth at planting. Plant into a firm seedbed.



James B. Neel, Professor  
Animal Science

## Beef Cattle Time

From:

---

Leader/Agent

Visit the UT Extension Web site at  
<http://www.utextension.utk.edu/>

THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE   
INSTITUTE of AGRICULTURE

E12-4415-00-015-09 21M 09-0211

Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences, and resource development.  
University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and county governments cooperating.  
UT Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.