

## Recipe for Fall Calving

Fall calving is an option for those producers who are willing to increase their level of management to put themselves in an advantageous market position.

Do not undertake a change to fall calving without careful thought and planning. Most successful fall calving programs utilize stockpiled fescue and small grain pastures for creep grazing, for late fall and winter herd grazing and, possibly, as a spring hay crop.

**Advantages** include: 1) calving in good weather, 2) ability to take advantage of well-managed fall fescue stockpiling, 3) utilization of small grain pastures for developing calves and 4) the possibility of selling on strong spring markets.

**Disadvantages** include: 1) the possibility that late summer/fall drought can limit forage supply at calving and 2) there may be a need for more hay and/or supplement, especially if drought limits fall fescue growth or limits the use of small grain pastures.

### Recipe for Fall Calving

In Tennessee, it has been shown that calving in hot summer weather will result in calves that do not perform well. It is likely that this effect carries into September, so the earliest calving date should be early October. This works well by integrating the breeding season with a fall fescue stockpiling program. Following are suggested steps in a fall forage/calving program:

- Late August - Early September. Select fescue field(s) for stockpiling. Graze or clip the fields to remove accumulated grass and weeds. Then fertilize with approximately 60 lbs. actual N per acre. (Maybe less during dry weather). Allot about  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 acre per cow for stockpiling.
- September - Drill small grain pasture if moisture is adequate. It is not generally a good idea to drill into a fescue sod. At minimum, drill a few acres of small grain for a calf creep pasture. Additional acreage can be used for supplemental winter cow herd grazing and/or hay production.
- Early October - Calving begins. Aim for a 45-60 day calving season, but achieving this goal will require cows and bulls to be healthy and in optimum body condition leading up to and during the breeding season.
- Late November - Turn cows into stockpiled fescue (Thanksgiving weekend is easy to remember).
- Late December - Turn the bull(s) in. Cows bred on December 25 will calve about October 3. Consider starting to breed heifers a couple of weeks earlier than cows.
- Under good growing conditions, stockpiled fescue should last through December, but this will not happen every year. Be prepared to either start feeding hay, supplement or graze small grain pasture to keep cows in optimum condition during breeding season.
- Consider supplementing with concentrate if hay is of low quality or if cows are in poor condition. Base concentrate supplementation decisions on a forage test (preferably taken comfortably in advance so that results are known before hay feeding time). Provide a good mineral supplement.
- Late January - Open creep grazing gates to allow calves access to small grain pastures. Entice them to enter with sweet feed. Consider putting a large bale in the pasture to give the calves additional encouragement.
- Implement body condition scoring of cows in your management plan. This is probably the best method for assessing cow nutritional status during the year.

Additional information on managing beef cattle can  
be obtained by contacting your local  
Agricultural Extension Service Office or from the  
Animal Science Home Page: [www.agriculture.utk.edu/ansci/](http://www.agriculture.utk.edu/ansci/)