



BEEF CATTLE TIME

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Harvesting High Quality Hay

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Late summer and winter are periods of limited pasture growth. Even with proper fertilization and fall stockpiling, some feed will have to be provided during these times if grazing animals are to be kept in good condition. Hay is the most used stored feed on beef farms because it offers many advantages. It can be harvested and fed mechanically; it can be produced and fed in large or small amounts; if protected, quality can be maintained for long periods of time; and it can meet the nutritional needs of most classes of cattle.

Hay fits well with a grazing program because excess spring growth can be harvested as hay for later feeding, which minimizes forage waste. Harvesting the excess growth also results in the production of high quality pasture regrowth for grazing.

Because of the importance of hay to cattle production, producers should be aware of the factors that affect hay quality. The most important factor is the stage of maturity at harvest. This is the area where most producers can make the easiest and greatest improvements in quality. As legumes and grasses advance in maturity, they drop in crude protein and digestibility. The proper stage to harvest grass pastures is boot to early head stage for the first cut, then every 4-6 weeks afterwards. Tall fescue or orchard grass hay cut early will be high quality and can meet the nutritional needs of a lactating cow and calf. If the hay is cut too late, there will be more tonnage, but quality will be low and a protein and energy supplement will probably be required to meet the needs of the animals.

Frequently, it is not possible to get all of the hay cut at the proper stage, but it is important to get at least a portion

harvested when the quality is high. This is the hay to feed to lactating beef cows. The largest percentage of Tennessee's beef cows calve in January, February and March, before the grass pastures are producing much forage. The high quality hay can meet their needs, allowing them to produce adequate milk for their calves, while still maintaining good condition.

Several additional factors will affect hay quality. These are: (1) curing and handling conditions, (2) soil fertility, (3) species of plants, and (4) varieties. Poor curing and handling conditions can result in leaf nutrient loss. If hay gets rained on in the field, nutrients can be lost through leaching. In the spring, it is difficult to predict when three days of good weather will occur, so be prepared to cut hay when periods of good weather are available. Don't wait to check the equipment until the night before cutting – have the machinery checked out well in advance. After the hay is cut, handle it so as to maximize the harvesting of leaves. This means raking when the hay is still a little moist so that there will be minimal leaf loss. The leaves are the highest quality portion of the plant. If leaves are lost, quality is lost. Don't let the leaves become expensive mulch and fertilizer.

The species of plants used for hay will influence pasture quality. For example, legumes are generally higher quality than grasses. This means that adding a clover to a grass pasture will usually result in higher quality hay. It is important to remember, however, that if the hay is cut too mature, the legume will drop in quality just as the grass does.

Maintaining soil fertility and planting adapted varieties are helpful in hay quality, because these are two factors that will influence hay yield and stand life. An adapted variety with high soil fertility has the best chance of having a long stand life and will be the most competitive with weeds. Large

amounts of weeds will reduce the quality and palatability of the hay.

Plan to harvest excess forage when the quality is high. When it is stored, it will be a good source of nutrients for the cows that can be fed when it is needed later in the year.

Marketing Opportunities Abound

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Interest is high in feeder cattle marketing alliances. This is unusual, especially when prices for feeder cattle have been near record levels. If a feeder cattle marketing alliance can be defined as a group of producers working together to improve the market value of their cattle, then we need to reflect on what is new and what is not.

With the large number of producers with small cow herds, production and marketing of feeder calves is very fragmented. This creates more opportunity for those selling products and services to beef producers including auction markets. Assembly of calves into marketable units by buyers is one function of auction markets. With 55 percent of the Tennessee beef cows on farms with 49 head or less, it definitely will take some cooperation to market truck loads of 48,000 to 50,000 pounds.

Graded feeder cattle sales (marketing alliances) have been around the Southeast and in Tennessee since at least the early 1940s. According to Bill Tyrrell, retired UT Extension animal scientist, "John Ewing started the first feeder sales in Tennessee in 1937 up at Shouns in Johnson County." Those sales required commitment by producers to market calves which had been dehorned and castrated, were sired by "beef type bulls," and had received some minimum level of vaccinations such as blackleg and malignant edema. They also agreed to market on the same date. Though graded sales in Tennessee, with the exception of the Sweetwater Southeast Pride Plus sale, have dropped the vaccination requirement, Tennessee Department of Agriculture graders still do an excellent job of grading and grouping similar cattle for sale as well as diverting any calves with defects such as horns, bull, stags, eye problems (calves of lower value) and such to the odd lot pen where they are sold as singles. McMinnville, Sweetwater and Cookeville are the sites of the largest graded sales in the state. Market management takes an active role in promoting and managing these sales, which are now held with increasing frequency to meet producer needs.

The requirements buyers are looking for in feeder calves are more stringent now than in past years. Yes, they will buy what they can get and do what they must to keep calves healthy and performing in stocker or feedlot programs. However, for producers who are trying to move to the front and do a better job of producing and marketing what buyers are seeking, it will take cooperation to agree on health/management programs as well as possible use of more consistent genetics. A tight calving period certainly facilitates both the management and marketing process and should be an objective of any marketing group. For the producer of calves with a wide weight range, graded calf sales offer a group to fit each calf, even though some groups are small. It certainly works to the producers' advantage to have calves sell with the larger groups.

For producers who wish to work together to market a specially prepared group of feeder calves or yearlings, there is no shortage of ways to get this done. The cattle can be marketed in conjunction with a weekly auction, graded sale, video sale or Internet sale. What is needed is the commitment on the part of producers to work together. What can be done right away? Producers need to evaluate the number of calves that can be committed to a program. That program might be a special sale or a separate group of calves sold at the regular graded sale, weekly auction or video sale. The calves would need to have some minimum level of vaccinations such as the Southeast Pride Level II (double vaccinated) or Level III (double vaccinated and weaned), possibly using a single brand of product, BQA certification, possibly weaning of calves, and a standard post weaning ration. If the cattle are sold while still on the farms, field inspection by graders would be needed to describe the calves and identify any that might detract from the load. It takes a hundred 500 pound calves of one sex to make a load. If the weight spread is no more than 150 pounds, it takes a minimum of about 250 cows to market the calves as a load. Of course if they are to be part of a graded sale, calves heavier or lighter could be sold with other groups. Experience has shown that forcing a buyer to take groups, especially calves, with more than a 150-pound spread in weight will result in lower prices than more uniform groups. If producers can accomplish some or all of the above, then a plan to move towards more uniform genetics is needed, and it will take 18 to 24 months to market the resulting calf crop.

So call it an alliance or whatever you like. If beef producers can work together to market calves, there are marketing agencies ready to handle the sale. A bonded marketing agency is recommended to ensure the check is good and to make sure descriptions and weigh-ups of

the cattle work smoothly. For assistance in learning about group marketing opportunities and ways to manage and market calves for more net dollars, contact your local county Agricultural Extension agent.

Controlling Flies in Beef Cattle Herds Improves Performance and Value

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Controlling flies can both add value and improve performance of cattle. Face flies and horn flies are an annual problem on beef cattle. The fly season starts in April and runs through September.

Flies reproduce rather rapidly, which makes them more difficult to control. Horn flies have a generation about every two weeks and face flies every eight to 10 days.

Horn flies are blood suckers that irritate cattle and interfere with feeding and resting. Face flies also annoy cattle, interfere with feeding, cause excessive eye secretions, and transmit pink eye, which results in reduced weight gain and milk production. USDA research reported that heavy infestation of flies resulted in cows losing about one-half pound of weight daily and a 20 percent reduction in milk production. The Tennessee beef industry annually loses millions of dollars due to these two pests.

“On-the-farm” demonstrations conducted in Tennessee in 2001 showed that backgrounded calves “tagged” with insecticide treated ear tags gained 2.34 pounds per day compared to 1.6 pounds in the control group (non-tagged). Over a 120-day period, this would produce an extra 88 pounds per animal. In cow-calf herds, calves from herds treated with various insecticide treated ear tags gained 2.84 pounds per day compared with 1.90 pounds per day for calves with no fly control. Over a 120-day period, this would total more than 100 pounds extra weight to market. The level of response to fly control will also be influenced by the level of infestation.

Considering the added weight gain due to fly control and the reduced value of feeder cattle that results from pinkeye infection, producers can easily see the economic advantages to controlling flies.

Plan fly control strategy early. Methods of control include spot-ons, pour-ons, dusts, dips, sprays, backrubbers, oral larvacides, boluses and ear tags. Consider what was done the past year or two when making plans for this year. Insecticide impregnated ear tags have been one of the most popular methods of controlling flies since they became

available. There are three main groups of ear tags: those that are impregnated with an organophosphate, those with a synthetic pyrethroid and those with both. Use a tag which has either a phosphate or a pyrethroid but not both. Flies tend to become resistant to an insecticide that is used for several consecutive years. Therefore, alternating between the phosphates and pyrethroids each year is recommended.

Since most ear tags are effective for only about five months, researchers also recommend waiting until the first of May to place them on the ears of cattle. This is later than would normally be recommended for more conventional methods of fly control.

Due to the mild winter, flies may become a problem earlier than normal this season. You may need to use several sprays or a backrubber until ear tags are in place.

A combination of practices may be needed periodically during the fly season. If tags are used and flies begin to build up in the peak fly season, supplemental treatments such as a spray or pour-on may be necessary to bring them under control.

In summary, evaluate last year’s fly control program. If an ear tag was used, rotate to a tag with a chemical of a different family. Keep close watch on the fly population and use a supplemental control measure if necessary. Have a plan in mind.

What Are You Doing to Keep Buyers Competing for Tennessee Feeder Cattle?

*James B. Neel, Professor
Animal Science*

Cattle feeders know calves that are genetically, health and preconditioned verified and offered for sale in groups of similar cattle by Beef Quality Assurance Certified producers are what they want to feed. It is because these calves are of greater value to them. This value has been verified through feedlot performance and evaluation of carcass traits. Our Tennessee cow-calf producers need to realize the same thing and produce a like kind of feeder cattle.

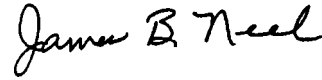
Calves are currently in short supply and prices will continue to be good this fall and into the next couple of years. Even with a low feeder supply and good prices, it is important for the Tennessee cow-calf industry to produce and market feeder calves that have been treated to the Southeast Pride Blue Tag Health and Management Program or a similar one such as the Tennessee Beef Advantage. It is also important for our cow-calf producers to get together to market uniform calves in larger numbers.

If approximately 1,000 genetically similar feeder calves that have received a recognized pre-conditioned

program (see above) and for which health practices were carried out according to BQA guidelines were offered for sale, this would attract a number of potential buyers. Large numbers of calves are needed to put together trailer-load lots of similar cattle to attract buyers. With 24 cows in an average size Tennessee cow herd, it would take around 50 Tennessee cow-calf producers to accomplish this.

As feeder cattle producers and others associated with the state's beef industry, we need to work together to establish a positive reputation for our cattle. Our calves need to be genetically and health verified to include bunk breaking for 45 days. In five to six years, calves will be selling for reduced prices. What will keep the buyers coming to Tennessee? We need to establish a reputation for the production and marketing of feeder cattle. This will

help to ensure that buyers will continue to purchase Tennessee feeder cattle. If we don't, the buyers will go elsewhere, and there will be a large discount for "average" or "commodity calves." In the long run, it will pay to aim high and work to achieve that goal. If not, we will always be in the position of asking, "What will you gimme?"



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Beef Cattle Time

From:

Leader/Agent

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Agricultural Extension Service Charles L. Norman, Dean

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