NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NC Cooperative Extension Service

Caswell County Center
PO Box 220
Yanceyville, NC 27379
Phone: (336) 694-4158
Fax: (336) 694-5930
URL: http://caswell.ces.state.nc.us

CASWELL AMAZING GRAZING EXTENSION NOTES
Spring 2015

Hello again,

It's been a while since my last newsletter because of budget cuts, more responsibilities as serving in the role of being the only agriculture agent for Caswell County, and other administrative items; but the Extension Office is running at full speed and as an ex-dairyman, I love being busy because there's never a dull moment. As I sit at my desk and write this newsletter, I think about all the rain that we have had since January 1st of this year. It has been great for the livestock producers because of the abundance of pasture forage for grazing and high market prices, but tough on tobacco growers trying to bed land in preparations for transplanting. However, we can count our blessings for the rains instead of a drought this past spring and as always, deal with the current situation at hand the best way we can. I would like to thank all of you for your support that you bestow toward the Caswell County Center.

If there is any way that the Caswell County Extension Center can be of assistance to you and your farm business, then feel free to call me here at the office (336-694-4158) or my cell phone (434-728-5980). Here's some latest information that I hope will help you in your farming enterprise.

Reducing Heat Stress in Dairy Cattle

During the summer months heat stress on dairy cattle as well as other livestock causes a tremendous amount of economical losses from low milk producing herds. Some things to remember when trying to prevent heat stress in dairy cows are as follows:

- The optimum temperature for dairy cattle ranges from 25- 65F. When temperatures rise above 80F, a decrease in feed intake by 8-12% occurs. When temperatures reach 90F or above then breeding performance is poor.

- Cattle sweat only 10% as much as man; therefore, evaporative cooling such as body sprinkling or fans for good air movement is essential.

- Use high-quality forages to reduce heat produced in digesting and assimilating feed. Make certain the neutral fiber (NDF0 level is at least 26-28%. Increase levels of certain minerals to compensate for higher losses from the body during hot humid weather.

- Some older research in Texas has illustrated that chilled water at 50F will allow the cows to produce approximately 5 lbs. of more milk/day/cow verses drinking water temperatures at 86F.

- Increase sanitation during hot, humid weather because the risk of mastitis and other infections increases. A need for more bedding, cleaning and disease control is essential.

Creep-Graze Calves

Creep-grazing is the practice of allowing suckling calves to graze the highest quality forage available while restricting cows to pastures that are lower in quality or less abundant. Research at VA-Tech University has shown an increase of 25 to 50 pounds in calf weaning weight where creep grazing is used. Creep grazing is a very simple practice to start. An area of the pasture needs to be selected that parallels the area where cows will be grazing. Creep holes for calves should be generally 18 inches wide and 40 inches high. In general 4 calves can be creep-grazed per acre of permanent pasture. Up to 10 calves can be grazed per acre of summer annuals. For example, a herd with 60 calves you will need to fence off about 15 acres for creep grazing. Those added pounds could help the profit of your cattle operation especially since feeder cattle prices have drop from spring prices.

Deworm Spring Calves In Early August

If you fail to get spring born nursing calves de-wormed in July, early August will do. Use any one of a number of good de-worming materials on spring born calves, 75 to 90 days prior to weaning which will be, in most instances, in July. The weight gain advantage has proven mid-season de-worming adds weight and makes money. There is usually no need to de-worm cows at this time, only calves.

August 2015

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Fall Feeder Calf Sales

Carolina Stockyards at Siler City will conduct one graded feeder calf sale this fall. The date is August 26, 2015. To be sold at Graded Sales, all calves must be less than one year old, males must be castrated and healed, and all must be dehorned. In addition the calves must be vaccinated against Blackleg and Malignant Edema. There are other graded sales starting May 21 in Norwood as well as other dates in Statesville, and North Wilkesboro if the May 21st date does not fit your schedule. If you need consignment forms to designate feeder cattle to one of these sale barns, then feel free to contact me.

May Beef Management Calendar

May 2015

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Spring Calving Herds

- Breeding season continues.
- Observe performance of bulls during breeding season. If the number of cows returning to estrus is large, try to determine the cause and consider changing bulls.
- Maintain salt and mineral feeders. Provide a free choice mineral mix containing adequate levels of phosphorous, Vitamin A, selenium, copper, zinc, and other trace minerals at all times.

Fall Calving Herds

- Weaning period—during this time give any necessary booster vaccinations to calves.
- Obtain cow and calf weights at weaning. Cull cows based on performance and pregnancy status. Make initial heifer selections, keeping more than required for the next breeding season.
- Pregnancy test cows if not done previously.
- Creep graze calves or wean and put on best pastures. If calves are weaned, restrict pasture access for cows.
- Weaned calves can be conditioned by feeding a complete dry ration for a short period of time after vaccinating, deworming and implanting.

Considerations For All Cattle

- Don't start fly control until fly population builds up.

Grazers Checklist

- Make hay or baleage early for higher quality feed.
- Walk pastures often to monitor forage growth and view animals.
- Be flexible in rotating animals—don't be locked into a paddock sequence if grass height indicates a different order.
- Consider portable cross fencing to allow haying or resizing pasture paddocks if needed.
- Scout fields used for heavy feeding over the winter to identify emerging weed problems and determine necessary control in a timely manner.
- Plant warm-season annuals if needed for supplemental summer grazing. I prefer the hybrid pearl millet varieties.

August-Time To Stockpile Fescue

August 2015

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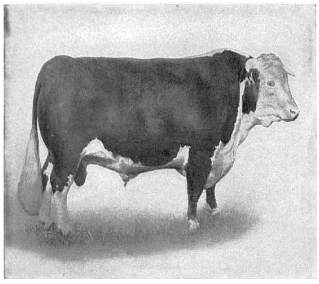
Extending the grazing season using cool season grasses and legumes can be one of the most cost-effective practices available to farmers. In North Carolina, this practice is most often accomplished by stockpiling tall fescue in the late summer and early fall. Stockpiling fescue can help reduce feed cost by 50-60 percent.

Standard recommendations in North Carolina are to apply 60 to 80 lbs. of nitrogen around August 15. Typically the quality of the stockpiled forage is as good as or better than the "good hay" in your barn.

To further enhance the utilization of stockpiled forage use strip grazing to limit access. Strip grazing reduces the loss of forage to trampling, bedding on grass, manure, etc. Strip grazing can be accomplished by using temporary electric fencing, which can be moved easily as needed. In work done in North Carolina in 1995, savings of $20/head was gained by using strip grazing of 47 yearling heifers and 22 first calf cows on 35 acres of unfertilized pasture/hay field - fescue, blue grass, orchard-grass, red and white clover. Don't forget to call our office if you need to use the Caswell County Cattlemen's no-till drill ($12.00 per acre) to interseed clovers and grasses into your hayfields and pastures.

Ten Steps to Buying the Right Bull



Over the 27 years in Extension I have given a lot of recommendations in buying the right bull for cattle producer's herds. Every herd is not the same! Remember, most of your genetic improvements in your herd come from your bull power! I have come up with ten steps which is a little lengthy in discussion, but you may want to follow them during this upcoming fall season when looking for a new herd bull. Those ten steps are as follows:

1) Identify Herd Goals--Herd goals serve as the foundation for sire selection and provide guidance as to traits with the most relevance. Defining the production and marketing system, along with management strategies and environment, are key factors that warrant consideration:

- Will the bull be used on heifers, mature cows, or both?
- Will replacement females be retained in the herd?
- How will the calf crop be marketed (at weaning, backgrounded, retained ownership, sell females)?
- What are the labor and management resources available?
- What are the feed resources and environmental conditions of the operation?

2) Assess Herd Strengths and Weaknesses--Fundamental records are necessary to identify herd strengths and weaknesses. Basic performance parameters such as calving percentage, weaning percentage, weaning weights, sale weights, carcass merit, feed usage, etc. are necessary to serve as the basis for assessing areas of strength and those needing attention.

3) Establish Selection Priorities--Concentrate on those factors which stand to have the largest impact on profitability. Remember that income is derived from performance (sale weight, % calf crop weaned, carcass merit, etc.). Performance is a function of both genetics and environment/management. Superior genetics can be negated by poor management, which emphasizes the importance of separating the impact of management (nutrition, health program) from that of genetics when specific priorities for the herd are established. Considering both the genetic and management influences on various traits is important. Focus on the handful of priority traits rather than attempting to change many traits simultaneously. Establishing the few traits to focus on is the key factor.

4) Utilize Selection Tools--Once selection priorities have been established through close examination of herd goals and current status, a number of useful tools are at the disposal of beef producers to assist in making genetic improvement. Genetic differences across breeds have been well established, and utilization of different breeds in a complimentary fashion through structured crossbreeding plans provides the opportunity for improvement in multiple traits. Most importantly, heterosis attained through crossbreeding has been shown to have significant favorable impacts on traits such as reproductive efficiency and cow longevity which are critical for herd profitability. The limited ability to select for reproductive traits in the form of EPDs further emphasizes the importance of capturing the value of heterosis. EPDs are available for many traits of economic importance. The introduction of economic indexes which combine several related traits and their economic values into one EPD are available to assist with simultaneous improvement in multiple traits which impact areas such as carcass merit and post -weaning profit. Again, with the large number of EPD tools available, the critical step is to determine the EPDs which are most important and establish benchmarks relative to each.

5) Establish Benchmarks--Several tools can be utilized to assist in the determination of EPD specifications. EPD values for current and past sires can be used as benchmarks. With these benchmarks, EPD specifications can be set to reflect the desired increase or moderation in performance for a particular trait. As an example, establishing a benchmark for milk EPD can be 4 determined through the relationship between previous sires' genetics for milk and the performance of his daughters in the herd.

6) Find Source--With the above defined, we can now begin to look at individual bulls. There are many sources of bulls that warrant consideration- such as production sales, test stations, and private treaty sales. Of critical importance is that the bull be from a reputable source which will stand behind their product. It may be necessary to look at several sources in order to find the correct bull.

7) Do Your Homework--The first step to doing so is to evaluate the sale catalog, performance pedigree, and data. By examination of the bull's performance record, determine which bulls meet the EPD and other specifications that have been established (and likewise eliminate those that do not meet the specifications). Be prepared to make trade-offs, as the perfect record may not be attainable. Do not be surprised or alarmed when the bulls you have highlighted appear scattered throughout the sale order. Remember to stick to the selection criteria and qualifications specifications that have been established. All this can and should be accomplished prior to departing to any sale.

8) Take a Look--Once the list has been narrowed to only bulls which meet the criteria, these bulls can be further evaluated and selection refined. Having a list of suitable bulls prior to arrival at the auction or farm will not only save time, but also assist in making sure the right bull for the situation is purchased. Upon narrowing the potential candidates on paper, the bulls can be evaluated for suitability of phenotypic traits and the potential candidate list shortened even further. Not all relevant traits have EPDs (examples include disposition, foot soundness, fleshing ability, etc.), and therefore must be evaluated visually.

9) Make a Sound Investment--For many cow-calf producers, purchasing a new bull is a relatively infrequent occurrence. This emphasizes the importance of selecting the right bull, particularly in single sire herds. The value of the right bull cannot be underestimated. Investments in good genetics will pay dividends both short and long-term through the influence the bull has on each calf crop as well as his daughters that are retained in the herd.

10) Manage the New Bull Properly--Of equal importance is the care and management of the newly acquired bull. Proper management and nutrition are essential for the bull to perform satisfactorily during the breeding season. With most new herd sires purchased as yearling bulls-management prior to, during, and after the first breeding season is particularly important. Plan ahead by acquiring a new yearling bull at least 60 to 90 days prior to the breeding season so that ample time is available to allow for adjustment to a new environment, commingling with other bulls, and getting the bull in proper breeding body condition.

Six Tips For Cost-Effective Weed Control

Herbicides are most cost-effective when used correctly. Six tips that I have recognized over the 27 years in extension are:

- Identify the weed problem.
- Use a calibrated sprayer (now is a good time to do this if you have not already done this; will be glad to help you with this if needed).
- Spray at the right time with the right rate.
- Recognize that drought stressed or mature weeds will be more difficult to control.
- Always follow label directions for application and mixing.
- Remember soil residual activity and plant residue.
- You should be spraying for weed control in pastures now, if not already done so.

Hope all of you have a good spring and summer growing and grazing season. As always, if I can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to give me a call.

Sincerely,

Joey E. Knight, III
County Extension Director

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A&T State University
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