



Angus Advisor

► SEPTEMBER herd management tips

Southeast Region

by John Hall, Virginia Tech, jhall@vt.edu

Spring-calving herds

- Consider weaning calves to reduce feed requirements of cows if pasture is short due to drought.
- Inventory feed supplies for winter; make decisions on alternative feed supplies now.
- Give preweaning vaccinations to calves for bovine respiratory disease (BRD).
- Pregnancy-check cows.
- Condition score and weigh cows at weaning and separate thin cows. Don't forget to record body condition score (BCS) on Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) forms.
- Put open, old and very thin cows on the cull list; put cull cows in a separate pasture to feed for sale in December.
- Make arrangements for backgrounding calves.
- Continue feeding high-selenium (Se) trace-mineral salt.
- Continue to stockpile grass, if possible.

Fall-calving herds

- Condition score cows; plan nutrition/grazing program according to BCS.
- Inventory feed supplies for winter; make decisions on alternative feed supplies now.
- Make sure all calving supplies are on hand and clean.
- Move pregnant heifers and early-calving cows to calving area about two weeks before due date.
- Start calving.
- Check cows three to four times per day; check heifers more often — assist early if needed.
- Keep calving area clean and well-drained; move healthy pairs to large pastures three days after calving.
- Tag all calves at birth; castrate male calves in commercial herds.
- Give selenium and vitamin A and D injections to newborn calves.
- Feed cows extra energy after calving, especially 2-year-olds. Cows calving at a BCS of less than 5 should receive special nutritional attention.
- Keep high-quality, high-selenium and high-magnesium (Mg) minerals available.
- Purchase estrus synchronization supplies; line up artificial insemination (AI) technicians or AI supplies.

Prussic acid poisoning could be a problem in late summer and early fall

Members of the sorghum family — such as grain sorghum, forage sorghum, sudex, Sudan grass and Johnsongrass — may produce high levels of prussic acid during times of stress.

Wild cherry, choke cherry, peach, apple and elderberry trees can also form prussic acid. Prussic acid, also known as hydrogen cyanide, is extremely toxic to mammals in high amounts. This cyanide compound quickly inhibits an animal's ability to use oxygen, and death occurs in a matter of minutes to hours.

The plants mentioned above produce sugars in the leaves and stems that contain the cyanide ion. Drought-stressed plants produce high levels of these sugars. When the plant is damaged or chewed, these sugars combine with other enzymes in the plant to produce prussic acid. Normally, plant growth keeps the concentration of these sugars low enough that the animal can detoxify the prussic acid. However, concentrations of prussic acid reach toxic levels in drought-stressed, frost-damaged or storm-damaged plants.

To avoid prussic acid poisoning, producers should not graze cattle on drought-stressed, storm-damaged or frosted forages from the sorghum family. Additionally, cattle should be kept away from wilted cherry leaves from newly cut or storm-damaged trees. The prussic acid danger in forages is reduced after several weeks of significant regrowth following a drought or one to two weeks following a killing frost. Dried cherry leaves do not pose a danger. Also, prussic acid content of the forage can be reduced by 50% through the hay curing or ensiling process. So, making hay or silage from these crops may be the best option.

Tests for prussic acid are available through state diagnostic labs or other laboratories. Forages should contain less than 500 parts per million (ppm) on a dry basis to be safe to feed. Pasture samples need to be taken fresh and frozen. Remember, summer annuals may also be high in nitrates. For more information on prussic acid poisoning in livestock or sampling procedures, contact your county Extension agent.

Midsouth Region

by David Lalman, Oklahoma State University, dlalman@okstate.edu

Spring-calving herds

1. Consult your veterinarian to plan the vaccination program for spring-born calves and spring-calving cows. Purchase the necessary supplies. An ideal situation is to vaccinate two to six weeks prior to weaning and again at weaning.
2. Consider weaning calves earlier than normal if cows are thin (BCS 4 or less), particularly 2- and 3-year-old cows and cows that are 10 years or older.
3. Continue creep-feeding program (such as the Oklahoma Silver program) for calves through weaning, if applicable.

Fall-calving herds

1. The calving season for fall herds in this region will be in full swing during the month of September. Identify calves at birth if possible.
2. Identify herd sires to be used in the AI program.
3. Continue the newly weaned bulls and heifers on the highest quality pasture available and provide a supplement such as in the Oklahoma Gold program [1 pound (lb.) per day of high-protein supplement with an ionophore] for cattle grazing native grass pasture or low-quality Bermuda grass pasture.

General recommendations

1. Concentration of critical minerals in forage declines as forage matures and as leaf-to-stem ratio declines from grazing pressure. Minerals that are of particular concern in the predominant forage species found in the southern Great Plains include phosphorus (P), copper (Cu), zinc (Zn) and selenium. A balanced supply of macrominerals and microminerals is an important component of the overall herd health program, influencing health of weaned calves as well as reproductive success.
2. Late-summer applications of about 50 lb. per acre of nitrogen (N) can produce high-quality Bermuda grass or fescue pasture from October through December. Pastures should be grazed, hayed or otherwise mowed before the fertilizer application is made. Forage production will be highly dependent on late summer precipitation.
3. Plan winter pasture program. Prepare seedbeds for small grain pastures and fertilize according to soil test. Planting early (early September) ensures maximum forage production, whereas planting later enhances grain yield.
4. Treat cattle for grubs after heel fly activity ceases, between July 1 and Oct. 1, before larvae reach the back.
5. Identify pasture weed problems to aid in planning control methods needed next spring. Adjust stocking rate and grazing system to control undesirable plants and forage accumulation for prescribed fire.
6. Evaluate cool-season pastures, commercial supplements and bulk feed commodity options for supplemental feed in winter.
7. Continue supplementation (such as the Oklahoma Gold program) for stocker and replacement heifers grazing moderate- to low-quality pasture.

Rocky Mountain West Region

by Steve Paisley, University of Wyoming, spaisley@uwyo.edu

These management considerations are based on a spring-calving season for commercial cows. If you calve at times other than February through April, the timing of many of these management considerations needs to be adjusted accordingly. Although most management tips would be similar for registered cows, additional considerations sometimes may be necessary.

Weaning date

Although there may be adequate summer forage, earlier weaning times may be beneficial from a herd management standpoint. Here are a few reasons to consider weaning calves at an earlier age:

- 1) Consider early weaning a portion of the herd, such as first- and second-calf heifers, as well as older, thin cows. Removing the calf will allow these thinner cows to regain weight and body condition going into the fall. If there is adequate summer forage, this may be the most economical way of adding needed weight and condition to these animals.
- 2) You may want to incorporate some form of low-stress weaning into the program. Weaning in smaller groups may make it easier to try, and experiment with fenceline weaning programs.
- 3) August and early September are usually good times to market open or cull cows. The market is typically stronger in August and September than in October and November, when it's saturated with open cows following pregnancy checks. This marketing consideration fits well with early weaning.
- 4) Calves may wean at slightly lighter weights, but seasonal market prices and added condition on the cows may help to minimize the effects of lower weights.

Marketing alternatives

If you haven't already done so, consider your calf-marketing plan by evaluating

alternatives. Increasing demand for natural and grass-fed cattle make these niche markets a viable alternative for a portion of the calf crop. For Wyoming producers, be sure to consider listing your cattle on www.wyobeef.com, a free cattle listing service developed and maintained by the University of Wyoming Animal Science Department, as well as the Wyoming Business Council. Additional information and contacts are listed on the site.

Preconditioning

Regardless of your weaning date, preconditioning programs are an important management consideration, especially if you are retaining ownership. A minimum vaccination program should include some type of four-way respiratory protection for infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), parainfluenza-3 (PI₃) virus, bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV) and bovine viral diarrhea (BVD) I and II, as well as vaccination for clostridial diseases (seven-way vaccines). Other considerations include leptospirosis and pasturella vaccines. Local veterinarians will provide specific vaccination suggestions for your area. If you are marketing your calves at weaning, consider one of the recognized programs such as VAC-45, VAC-34 or similar programs through your local auction market or video market.

As a ranch manager stated, "You don't have to be able to predict the future, just be able to react quickly when changes occur." Weaning date, marketing and vaccination programs are all management tools that can be adapted to fit this year's situation.

Midwest Region

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September is when forages mature rapidly, weaning becomes appropriate and weather dictates several key management decisions.

Breeding season

Remove bulls after 60 days with cows, or 45 days with heifers. Never run bulls for more than a 90-day breeding season.

Herd nutrition

- ▶ Provide ample amounts of clean, fresh drinking water.
- ▶ Consider limited-intake creep-feeding if:
 - drought conditions develop and persist;
 - range conditions limit milk production;
 - creep feed and/or grain prices are relatively low; or
 - value of gain allows for economic benefits.
- ▶ Tips for successful limited-intake creep-feeding include:
 - limit duration to the last 30-75 days before weaning;
 - limit intake to less than 2 lb. per head per day;
 - use an ionophore or other feed additive to maximize efficiency;
 - keep protein levels equal to or greater than 16%; and
 - watch high salt levels; they may help limit intake, but can be tough on feeders.
- ▶ Prepurchase bulk-rate winter supplementation prior to seasonal price increases.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 170

Herd health

If pinkeye is likely to be a problem, consider the following measures.

Preventive:

- ▶ Make sure the herd is receiving adequate dietary vitamins and trace minerals.
- ▶ Consider using a medicated trace-mineral package.
- ▶ Consider vaccination for pinkeye and IBR.
- ▶ Control face flies.
- ▶ Clip pastures with tall, coarse grasses that may irritate eyes.
- ▶ Provide ample shade.

Therapeutic:

- ▶ Administer an intramuscular (IM) injection of long-acting oxytetracycline when symptoms are first noticed.
- ▶ Shut out irritating sunlight by patching eyes, providing shade, etc.
- ▶ Control flies.
- ▶ Consult your veterinarian.
- ▶ Consider revaccinating any show animals for respiratory diseases.
- ▶ Vaccinate suckling calves for IBR, BVD, PI₃, BRSV and possibly pasteurilla at least three weeks prior to weaning.
- ▶ Revaccinate all calves for blackleg.
- ▶ Vaccinate replacement heifers for brucellosis (Bang's disease) at 4 to 10 months of age.
- ▶ Monitor and treat foot rot.

Forage/pasture management

- ▶ Enhance grazing distribution by placing mineral mixture away from water sources.
- ▶ Observe pasture weed problems to aid in planning control methods for next spring.
- ▶ Monitor grazing conditions and rotate pastures if possible and/or practical.
- ▶ If pastures will run out in late summer, get ready to provide emergency feeds. Start supplemental feeding to extend grazing before pastures are gone.
- ▶ Harvest and store forages properly. Minimize waste by reducing spoilage.
- ▶ Collect samples of harvested forages and have them analyzed for nitrate and nutrient composition.
- ▶ Plan winter nutrition program through pasture and forage management.

- ▶ For stocker cattle and replacement heifers, supplement maturing grasses with an acceptable degradable intake protein/ionophore (feed additive) supplement.

Reproductive management

- ▶ Remove bulls to consolidate calving season.
- ▶ Pregnancy-check and age pregnancies 60 days after the end of the breeding season.
- ▶ Consider culling cows that are short-bred.

These methods contribute to a more uniform calf crop, make winter nutritional management easier and increase the success rate of next year's breeding season.

General management

- ▶ Avoid unnecessary heat stress. Don't handle and/or truck cattle during the heat of the day.
- ▶ Repair, replace and improve facilities needed for fall processing.
- ▶ Order supplies, vaccines, tags and other products needed at weaning time.
- ▶ Consider early weaning if:
 - drought conditions develop and persist;
 - range conditions limit milk production;
 - cows are losing body condition;
 - calf and cull cow prices indicate maximum profit; or
 - facilities and management are available to handle lightweight calves.

- ▶ Remember, first-calf heifers have the most to gain from early weaning.
- ▶ Resist the temptation to feed cows without weaning; feeding early-weaned calves is more efficient.
- ▶ Look for unsound cows that need to be culled from the herd.
- ▶ Prepare to have your calf crop weighed and analyzed through your state, regional or breed performance-testing program.
- ▶ Document cost of production by participating in Standardized Performance Analysis (SPA) programs.
- ▶ Plan your marketing program, including private-treaty sales, consignment sales, test stations, production sales, etc.

