

# OFF THE HOOF

*Kentucky Beef Newsletter – August 2008*

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*Published Monthly by Dr. Les Anderson, Beef Extension Specialist, Department of Animal & Food Science, University of Kentucky*

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## Timely Tips

*Dr. Roy Burris, University of Kentucky Beef Specialist*

The best advice for this month is to be sure that cattle have plenty of shade, mineral supplementation, fly control, good pasture in addition to good water. Nursing calves should continue to gain during this “summer slump”.

## Spring-Calving Cow Herd

- Providing high quality forage to suckling calves will increase weaning weight. Creep graze or advance graze calves, providing them with the best forages available.
- Fescue pastures are not likely to produce much this month. *Pasture, other than fescue, can be beneficial.* If it looks like pastures will run out, provide emergency feed such as a neighbor's idle pasture, summer annuals or hay.
- Bulls should have been removed from the cow herd by now! They should be penned away from the cow herd with a good fence and allowed to regain lost weight and condition. It is a good time to evaluate physical condition, especially feet and legs. Bulls can be given medical attention and still have plenty of time to recover, e.g., corns, abscesses, split hooves, etc.
- Repair and improve corrals for fall working and weaning. Consider having an area to wean calves and retain ownership for postweaning feeding rather than selling “green” calves. Plan to participate in CPH-45 feeder calf sales in your area.

## **Fall-Calving Cow Herd**

- It will soon be time for fall calves. Get ready, be sure you have the following:
  - record book
  - ear tags for identification
  - iodine solution for newborn calf's navel
  - calf puller
  - castration equipment
- Dry cows should be moved to better pastures as calving time approaches. Cows should start calving next month. Yearling heifers may begin "headstart" calving later this month. Plan to move cows to stockpiled fescue for the breeding season, so it will soon be time to apply nitrogen fertilizer.

## **General**

- Select pastures for stockpiling. Remove cattle and apply nitrogen when moisture conditions are favorable. Stockpiled fescues can be especially beneficial for fall-calving cows after calving.
- Take soil samples to determine pasture fertility needs. Fertilize as needed, this fall.
- Cattle may also be more prone to eat poisonous plants during periods of extreme temperature stress. They will stay in "wooded" areas and browse on plants that they would not normally consume. Consider putting a roll of hay in these areas and/or spraying plants like purple (perilla) mint which can be toxic.
- Keep a good mineral mix available at all times. The UK Beef IRM Basic Cow-Calf mineral is a good choice.
- Provide shade and water! Cattle will need shade during the hot part of the day. Check water supply frequently – as much as 20 gallons may be required by high producing cows in very hot weather.
- Avoid working cattle when temperatures are extremely high – especially those grazing high-endophyte fescue. If cattle must be handled, do so in the early morning.
- Do not give up on fly control in late summer, especially if fly numbers are greater than about 50 flies per animal. You can use a different "type" of spray or pour-on to kill any resistant flies at the end of fly season.

## **Matching Pasture Quality to Animal Needs**

*Dr. Roy Burris, Beef Extension Specialist, University of Kentucky*

Now more than ever, it is important to make the most efficient use of our forage resources. Supplemental feed is very costly and must be used judiciously. We need to keep grazing cattle on pasture for as long a period as possible and feed only as necessary. As we do that, we must be sure that we are meeting the nutritional needs of the cows and calves. Most of our pasture systems are based fescue pastures. The typical production pattern for a cool season perennial like fescue is shown by figure 1. There is very little growth from February 15 to early April and fescue may almost go dormant from late July through August. Thus, these two periods are critical in the management of beef cattle. If adequate grass isn't available, stored or purchased feed must be utilized.

So, what is the most critical time in the production year for a beef cow? Nutritionally speaking, it is the time from calving to rebreeding. Usually a period of 70 to 90 days. Not only do we have to meet the

nutritional needs of the cow at that time, but they should approach calving time in good body condition and stay in good condition until they are rebred.

That critical period of time is usually from late February until late May in spring calving cows. Which means that cows need to be fed extra feed from calving time until they are turned out onto good pasture (usually from late Feb. to April 10<sup>th</sup>). The challenge is by the time calves become less dependent on milk and can use more forage (about 3 months of age) fescue pastures diminish in quantity and quality – the summer slump. We need to consider a portion of pasture which grows during that period of time to keep spring-calves growing in July/August.

Fall calving cows are “dry” during the summer forage slump and can be rebred during December and early January when accumulated fescue pasture is available. However, calves will need extra feed (creep feed or grazing) after the accumulated fescue is used up.

We have completed a three-year study of 5 different forage systems using fescue-based pastures at Princeton. Table 1 shows 3 of those systems for us to consider here – 2 of which are spring-calving systems and 1 is fall-calving. Each system consisted of 15 cow-calf pairs on 24 acres of pasture for 3 years. The goal was to graze about 10 months – feeding from about February 15 to April 15.

In each group, cows were in a body condition score of 5+ at the start of the breeding season – when cows were AI’ed using timed insemination. Pregnancy rates were similar for both spring calving groups – 89% for high endophyte and 91% for low endophyte. The fall group had a pregnancy rate of 96% with 71% pregnancy rate for the one round of a timed AI.

Calves that were born in the spring tended to be about 10 pounds heavier at birth (90 and 87 lb for HE and LE, respectively) than those born in the fall (79.6 lb). The same bulls were used AI throughout the trial and clean-up bulls were rotated across treatments. Spring calves were weaned on an average of October 17 when pasture became limiting and fall calves were weaned on June 1. The actual weaning weights were 581, 587 and 652 lb for spring/low, spring/high and fall/high, respectively. It is important to note that fall calves were older and received soyhulls as creep feed.

The most important thing to glean from this trial is that we can have forage management systems which are built around high-endophyte fescue that will perform similarly to low-endophyte systems if we meet the animals’ nutritional needs at critical times. Spring calving cows must come out of the winter-feeding period in good body condition (a BCS of 5 means that there is enough flesh to cover all of the ribs and spinous processes) and re-breed early for acceptable pregnancy rates.

Calf gains were also similar for both spring groups. Remember that pastures were rotationally grazed (6-4 acre blocks) and bermudagrass (% acreage) was available to graze during the summer slump period. Very little was gained by overseeding bermudagrass with cereal rye for winter grazing.

There are many forages and combinations of forages that will work for cow-calf production in Kentucky, but most will (1) be based on fescue, (2) insure that cows stay in good body condition especially at breeding, (3) meet the nutritional needs of cows and calves at critical times, and (4) rotational grazing is a vital method of stretching (or allotting) the forage supply. Using these management systems with a stocking rate of 1.6 acres per cow gave us enough grazing for about 10 months but did not allow for hay production – although it certainly minimized the need for stored feed.

	Spring High Fescue-clover (8) Fescue-N (12) Bermuda/Rye (4)	Spring Low Fescue clover (8) Fescue-N (12) Bermuda/Rye (4)	Fall High Fescue-clover (12) Fescue-N (12) w/creep feed
Item			
Cow-calf pairs/yr	15	15	15
Cow data			
Wt. @ breeding, lb	1288	1265	1290
BCS @ Breeding (1-9)	5.4	5.5	5.3
Pregnancy rate, no (%)	40/45 (89)	41/45 (91)	43/45 (96)
Timed AI rate, no (%)	27/45 (60)	22/45 (49)	32/45 (71)
Calf data (Avg. of 45/trtmt)			
Birthdate	Mar. 6	Mar. 11	Sept. 24
Birthweight, lb	90.2	87.2	79.6
Wean date	Oct. 17	Oct. 17	June 1
Actual wean wt, lb	581	587	652

Learn more about this and other trials by attending Beef Bash '08 in Princeton on September 23.

## You're Invited to the Beef Bash 2008

*Dr. Roy Burris, Beef Extension Specialist, University of Kentucky*

You've got to see this one! The University of Kentucky and the Kentucky Cattlemen's Association are busy planning a fall educational event with something for everyone. Circle September 23rd on your calendar and join us at the UK West Kentucky Station in Princeton for an afternoon with the cows. We'll start at 1:00 pm and go until dark.

What's different about this event? We want to have a more "user-friendly" field day – more interactive and less structured. You can come and go as you please, attend various demonstrations of your choosing, look at cattle exhibits, visit with commercial exhibitors, visit with other producers, or study various educational exhibits. Your choice. The name "Beef Bash" implies that we want you to have an enjoyable time while you learn.

Find the most up-to-date information at <http://ces.ca.uky.edu/beefirm/bash/> - but here's a general description of what you can do and see:

**Cattle.** You can see a "no-frills" cattle operation which provides animals for beef research. Research data will be provided comparing fall and spring calving. We keep about 150 cows which are evenly split between fall and spring calving. September the 23<sup>rd</sup> will be just after the first round of fall calving and just before the spring calves are weaned. Commercial cows are Angus breeding with some Brangus-influence. We maintain some registered Angus and Brangus animals to provide our own herd bulls. All animals are raised on the farm under a strict herd health program. The cows have one round of timed-AI utilizing CIDR's and then clean-up bulls are used for a short time. We'll have several cattle exhibits to illustrate various management practices.

**Commercial exhibits.** A large tent in the staging area will house commercial exhibits and serve as the focal point of all activities. You can visit with various company representatives as you please and make plans for purchasing products for weaning calves or wintering the cow herd. Information on many new products will be available. Take your time and visit a while.

**Hands-on Demonstrations.** Various “how-to” demonstrations will be conducted throughout the day. You can attend those that interest you and ask questions in a less formal environment. Examples of demonstrations are: bull selection, estrous synchronization technology, ration balancing, freeze-branding, alternative fertilizers, fencing and water, etc. We’ll spend more time “doing” and less time speech making.

**Social:** Visit with the leadership of the Kentucky Cattlemen’s Association and the University of Kentucky. The Dean and Associate Deans of the UK College of Agriculture are planning to attend and look forward to visiting with you. Bring any prospective agriculture students, especially those interested in Animal and Food Sciences with you. The beef Extension specialists and researchers will, of course, be available to visit and answer questions. We want to hear from you and get to know you.

KCA will be represented with leaders from across the state, especially the western part. Don Pemberton was President last year and Scotty Parsons will be President next year. Pres. Billy Glenn Turpin, Dave Maples and their staff will be there to visit with you. This event will help solidify KCA’s presence in the western part of the state and should keep KCA membership rolling toward the goal of 10,000 members. Come and visit with other cattlemen from across the state and be a part of making KCA the voice for all Kentucky cattle producers.

**Research Results.** Participants will learn about research which is being conducted to improve the beef herds of Kentucky and beyond. Feeding trials are being conducted with modified or dried distillers grains, corn gluten feed and soyhulls for growing calves. Different forage systems for spring or fall-calving cows has been studied for 3 years. Cutting-edge research has been conducted in the area of mineral supplementation of cattle – especially selenium. Other research has been conducted to extend the productive life of cows and to alleviate the effects of fescue toxicosis. We’ll have a separate tour to focus on this work.

All heifers which are produced at the station are trained to Calan® (electronic) individual feeding gates and are used in supplementation trials. The goal is to have an entire beef herd trained to the gates so research can be conducted on various supplements to mature cows in the same pasture.

Make plans now to spend some time with folks who are interested in the same things that you are – improving our position in the beef industry. Mark September 23 on your calendar and bring a neighbor. These are difficult economic times, but we’ll keep moving forward with meaningful research and continue to build an even stronger cattlemen’s organization. We need you!

## **Kentucky Beef Conference – October 28, 2008**

***Charlene Jacobs, Regional Program and Development Coordinator, University of Kentucky***

The Kentucky Beef Conference entitled "Planning Today for Tomorrow's Market," has been moved to October 28, 2008, instead of the usual January date. It will be held from 9 AM – 3 PM at the Fayette County Extension with registration beginning at 9:00 AM.

This year's conference will feature up-to-date information on beef marketing with an emphasis on herd management and marketing options. A representative from Cattle-FAX, Randy Blach, and UK Extension Specialists, Kenny Burdine, Dr. Cory Walters, Dr. Jeff Lehmkuhler will be the presenters. Topics to be covered are Marketing Overview and Long-Term Marketing Trends Related to Beef, Livestock Risk Protection Insurance, Control cost: Winter Feeding Strategies, Management Implication on Rising Input Costs, How to Optimize the Marketing Strategies of the producers.

Registration is \$10.00 per person to cover the cost of a buffet lunch and refreshments. Contact your county extension agent for reservations.

## **KFGC Field Day**

***Dr. Ray Smith, Forage Extension Specialist, University of Kentucky***

The Kentucky Forage & Grassland Council Field Day will be September 4, 2008 in Fairview Kentucky on the John Nowak farm. The farm is located on 68/80 between Hopkinsville and Elkton. Registration begins at 2:00 p.m. and tours begin at 2:30 and will be repeated before the rib-eyes are served at 6:30. Following the meal a "Blue Ribbon Panel" of Commercial Hay producers will share their experiences in the hay business and entertain questions from the audience. Speakers for the two tours which will feature Grazing, Watering Systems, Fencing, Hay Marketing, Establishment & Quality Hay Products include: Dr. Garry Lacefield, Dr. Ray Smith, Mr. Tom Keene, Mr. Kevin Laurent, Mr. David Fourqurean and Mr. Jeremy McGill. Programs and directions are available at each County Extension Office and on our website at:

[http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage/summergrazingtour%20with%20photos%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage/summergrazingtour%20with%20photos%20(2).pdf)

*from the Forage News edited by Dr. Gary Lacefield and Dr. Ray Smith*

## **9<sup>Th</sup> Kentucky Grazing Conference – Lexington, October 23, 2008**

***Dr. Ray Smith, Forage Extension Specialist, University of Kentucky***

The 9th Kentucky Grazing Conference is set for the Fayette County Extension Office on October 23. The program committee has done an excellent job putting together a timely agenda with excellent topics and speakers. Registration fee is \$15.00 (\$5.00 students) and includes breaks, meal, proceedings and other educational materials. No pre-registration is required. Details of the program topics and speakers are on our website at: <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage/9th%20KGC%20Program%20columns.pdf> and will be in next month's Forage News.

*from the Forage News edited by Dr. Gary Lacefield and Dr. Ray Smith*

## **Stockpiling Fescue**

***Dr. Ray Smith, Forage Extension Specialist, University of Kentucky***

With high nitrogen prices, many are wondering if it is economical to apply nitrogen to tall fescue in August to accumulate pastures for late fall and winter. Remember that "everyday grazed is money saved" compared to feeding hay or silage. If you already have more than enough hay to meet your winter needs and you don't have a good close market for your hay, then maybe this could be the year to save on your stockpiling nitrogen dollars; however, if your hay supply is still questionable and/or you want to graze as long as possible then adding 40-60 units of nitrogen to grazed or mowed tall fescue pastures in mid-August and using other pastures until they are gone before turning into stockpiled fields and "rationing the stockpiled forage" to minimize waste is still a viable consideration. For more details on stockpiling, see AGR-162 at each County Extension Office and on our website at:

<http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/agr/agr162/agr162.pdf> . There is also an excellent Stockpiling Decision-Aid Model developed by Dr. Greg Halich (AEC2008-06) also on our website at <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage/Forage%20Decision%20Aids.htm> from the *Forage News* edited by Dr. Gary Lacefield and Dr. Ray Smith

## August Marketing Report

*Kenny Burdine, Livestock Marketing Specialist, University of Kentucky*

USDA's July Cattle report showed small decreases in cattle numbers from the previous year. Estimates included a 1% reduction in the number of beef cows and a 2% reduction in the number of heifers being held for beef replacements. Slaughter reports had been suggesting that cow slaughter was running above year ago levels, which were also higher than normal. In short, it appears that slow liquidation is ongoing and based on heifer retention, is likely to continue (see table below).

While weather played the major role in herd liquidation during 2007, profitability likely plays the lead role this year. Calf prices are softer than they were last year and production costs are much higher due to rising fertilizer, fuel, and feed costs. While cow-calf operations enjoyed a nice run of profits from 1999 to 2007, that run will come to an end for most in 2008. For a lot of Kentucky producers, that run actually ended a year early due to the drought of 2007. Still, it's important to remember that cow-calf profits usually run in cycles (multiple good years, followed by multiple bad years). It's just been a while since we've seen these types of losses.

It is difficult to say how long liquidation will continue, but producers definitely don't expand when they are losing money. So, one of two things must happen, either production costs must fall enough to bring profit back, or calf prices must increase enough to offset the higher production costs. If production costs stay at these high levels, we will continue to liquidate cows until the smaller supply of calves brings prices high enough to do just that. And given the rapid rise in production costs recently, that process could take several years.

### USDA July 1, 2008 Cattle Inventory Report

	2007 (1,000 hd)	2008 (1,000 hd)	2008 as % of 2007
<b>Total Cattle and Calves</b>	104,800	104,300	100
<b>Cows and Heifers That Have Calved</b>	42,500	42,400	100
Beef Cows	33,350	33,150	99
Milk Cows	9,150	9,250	101
<b>Heifers 500 Pounds and Over</b>	16,600	16,500	99
For Beef Cow Replacement	4,700	4,600	98
For Milk Cow Replacement	3,900	3,900	100
Other Heifers	8,000	8,000	100
<b>Steers 500 Pounds and Over</b>	14,900	14,700	99
<b>Bulls 500 Pounds and Over</b>	2,100	2,100	100
<b>Calves Under 500 Pounds</b>	28,700	28,600	100
<b>Cattle on Feed</b>	12,300	11,700	95
<b>Calf Crop</b>	37,361	37,250	100

Source: NASS, USDA

## **Roberts Agricultural Commodity Market Report**

*Mike Roberts, Commodity Marketing Agent, Virginia Tech University*

### **Headlines:**

Commodities fell sharply on Monday as crude oil dropped as much as \$5/barrel during the day, prompting funds and large speculators to shed copper, corn and other hard assets as alternative investments. Grains took more of a hit than most other commodities.

Corn, soybean, and wheat futures sank as traders unloaded positions ahead of a USDA World Agriculture Supply Demand Estimate report that is expected to show pretty decent production despite U.S. flooding. Weakness in the U.S. Dollar and the threat of regulation limits appeal of commodity investments for fund and large speculative non-commercial accounts as a hedge against inflation.

**CORN** on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) sank (tanked?) on Monday. According to the CME Group's website the daily trading limit will be expanded to 45.0¢/bu for Tuesday. The SEPT'08 contract finished at \$5.354/bu, down 29.4¢/bu and 46.6¢/bu cents lower than a week ago. The DEC'08 contract closed at \$5.554/bu, also off 29.4¢/bu and 45.8¢/bu lower than this time last week. Fund selling on weaker crude oil prices, good crop weather, lower-than-expected exports, and weak technicals pressured corn prices from the opening. Funds sold over 14,000 contracts in speculative liquidation. Corn-inspected-for-export was placed at 29.670 mi bu by USDA on Monday vs. expectations for between 36-42 mi bu. China has lowered demand temporarily as it limits manufacturing to accommodate the Olympic games. The December '08 contract fell below key technical support of \$5.63 established on July 23. As expected, USDA late Monday showed no change in the U.S. corn crop conditions ratings. Cash corn in the U.S. Midwest was steady to firm amid slow sales on the river. Cash corn in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic States was weak on bids between 29.0¢/bu and 60.0¢/bu lower in many places. Users of corn should be getting quite slap-happy at some of these prices. They are waiting to price more when it is cheaper. Those who have up to 70% of the '08 crop priced today should be quite happy today as well. It is never a good idea to price over 70% of a crop but looks like prices are headed further south. Two weeks ago this chartist put the measuring objective for December '08 corn at \$4.82/bu. It will most likely get there sooner rather than later.

**SOYBEAN** futures on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) were down on Monday. The AUG'08 contract finished at \$12.870/bu, down 70.6¢/bu from Friday's close and \$1.132/bu (8.1%) lower than a week ago. NOV'08 soybean futures closed at \$12.950/bu, off 70.0¢/bu and \$1.01/bu (7.2%) lower than last Monday. The November'08 contract reached its measuring objective of \$13.484/bu today in a gap down move. Tuesday's trading limit on contract outright is now set at \$1.05/bu. Long liquidation on sliding crude prices, weak technicals, good crop making weather, and decreasing export expectations pressured the soybean market too. Funds sold 6,000 lots while USDA placed soybeans inspected for export at 7.555 mi bu vs. expectations between 8-12 mi bu. Chart signals of declining moving averages on increased volume and a gap down in trading indicate lower prices are coming. Cash soybeans along the river were mixed but indicated some firming in spot locations. In the U.S. Mid-Atlantic States cash beans dropped like a rock matching futures 70.0¢/bu decline in many, many places. In other news Brazil's '08/'09 soybean crop is now forecast at 64.14 mi tonnes (2.4 bi bu), up 7.2% from last year's harvest. If up to 50% of the 2008 crop has been not been sold it is now a very, very good idea to do so. Heck, it would be a very good consideration to get to 60%-70% sold at this time. Soybean processors and meal users are finally daring to smile a little.

**WHEAT** futures in Chicago (CBOT) declined on Monday. The SEPT'08 contract closed at \$7.586/bu, off 35.2¢/bu from Friday and 39.0¢/bu lower than a week ago. JULY'09 wheat futures closed off 33.2¢/bu at

\$8.336/bu; 35.0¢/bu lower than this time last week. Pressuring wheat prices was spillover from sliding corn & soybean futures, technical selling, and rising global stocks while exports and reports of heat stressed U.S. 2 spring wheat were supportive. Ukraine is expected to begin increasing exports in the near future. Funds sold over 5,000 lots of CBOT wheat. Wheat prices also fell in Kansas City and Minneapolis. Support was noted in exports. USDA placed wheat-inspected-for-export at 27.437 mi bu vs. expectations for between 15-20 mi bu. In addition, Egypt issued a quick tender for 55,000-60,000 tonnes (2.0-2.2 mi bu) after the market closed while Iraq continues to buy large quantities of U.S. winter wheat. Pakistan issued a new international tender for 250,000 tonnes (9.2 mi bu) of wheat on Friday while the U.S. Commodity Credit Corporation gave notice it will tender for 23,270 tonnes (855,033 bu) of U.S. Wheat. Cash bids for wheat in the U.S. Plains was steady while in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic States cash wheat bids were 33.0¢/bu-70.0¢/bu cents lower. It would be okay to hold off pricing any more of the '09 crop at this time.

**LIVE CATTLE** futures on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) were off on Monday with the exception of the nearby August contract amid some position squaring. The August contract will expire on the 29th. The AUG'08LC contract closed at \$100.175/cwt, up \$0.150/cwt from Friday and \$3.100/cwt higher than this time last week. OCT'08LC futures were off \$0.300/cwt at \$107.500/cwt but \$2.700/cwt higher than last Monday. Speculative profit taking and fund liquidation from last week's run-up put the pressure on prices while declines in feedstuffs were supportive. Fundamentally lower feed costs and a smaller herd are supporting the market even though marketings and placements published last week were not as bullish as traders thought they would be. Exports remain strong while seasonal demand is expected to increase cattle buying. Cash cattle were \$2-\$2.50/cwt higher with USDA placing the 5-area average at \$97.09/cwt vs. \$94.78/cwt a week ago. Early on Monday USDA put the choice boxed beef cutout at \$159.18/cwt, up \$0.86/cwt. According to HedgersEdge.com, the estimated average packer margin was a positive \$38.45/head based on the average buy of \$94.88/cwt vs. a breakeven of \$97.85/cwt. If you bought feed the last time it was advised and have enough for a bit longer it would be a good idea to hold off buying more. Corn and soybeans are going to get cheaper.

**FEEDER CATTLE** at the CME closed mixed on Monday. AUG'08FC futures were up \$0.200/cwt at \$115.425/cwt; \$0.775/cwt higher than last Monday. The SEPT'08 contract finished the day at \$117.825/cwt, up \$0.125/cwt from Friday's close and \$6.675/cwt higher than last Monday. Corn price declines were supportive while lower live cattle, profit taking, and October/November bear spreading limited momentum. The latest CME Feeder Cattle index for August 1 was placed at \$110.79/cwt, down \$0.40/cwt. Cash feeder prices are expected to move higher on seasonal demand. It may be a good idea to hold feeders a little longer if grass is plentiful. Corn will be further pressured so any grain needs can be put off for a bit unless you are out.

**LEAN HOGS** on the CME closed mixed on Monday. The AUG'08LH contract closed at \$82.250/cwt, up \$0.675/cwt and \$3.700/cwt higher than a week ago. The FEB'09 contract closed up \$0.325/cwt at \$74.950/cwt but \$7.500/cwt lower than last week at this time. Strong exports and packer demand were supportive in the nearbys while fund liquidation, profit taking, and lower corn prices weighed on prices. Yes, that's right, lower corn prices were seen as bearish. According to several pit traders interviewed today, lower corn prices have traders thinking that the herd will not liquidate as much as previously expected. USDA put the pork cutout at \$88.90/cwt, up \$0.67/cwt. According to HedgersEdge.com, the latest packer margin was placed at \$9.50/head based on the average buy of \$60.23/cwt vs. an average breakeven of \$63.91/cwt. The latest CME Lean Hog index was placed at \$82.35/cwt, off \$0.06/cwt. It might be a good idea to hold hogs almost ready to heavier weights while planning to sell hogs a little on the lighter side a couple months off. Opportunities to price feed are now if you have only priced short term needs to this point.