

OFF THE HOOF

Kentucky Beef Newsletter – January 2008

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

Fall Calving Cow Herd

- Breeding season continues. Cows can “strip” graze stockpiled/accumulated fescue now or they need 25-30 pounds of good quality hay, or its equivalent. They will need supplementation this year, especially if hay intake is limited.
- Catch up on castrating, dehorning and implanting.
- Provide clean windbreaks and shelter for young calves.
- Remove bulls by the end of the month. That means that your 2008 fall calving season will end in early November.

Spring-Calving Cow Herd

- Start cows on the high magnesium mineral supplement soon. Consider protein supplementation if hay is much below 10% crude protein. If cows are thin, begin energy (grain) supplementation now.
- Keep replacement heifer calves gaining enough to reach their "target" breeding weight (65% mature weight) by spring.
- Get ready for calving season! See that all equipment and materials are ready, including obstetrical equipment, record forms or booklets, ear tags, scales for obtaining birthweights, etc. Prepare a calving area where assistance can be provided easily if needed. Purchase ear tags for calves and number them ahead of time if possible. Plan for enough labor to watch/assist during the calving period.
- Move early-calving heifers and cows to pastures that are relatively small and easily accessible to facilities in case calving assistance is needed. Keep them in good condition but don't overfeed them at this time. Increase their nutrient intake after they calve.
- Consider vaccinating the cows to help prevent calf scours.
- Study the performance of last year's calf crop and plan for improvement. Plan your breeding program and consider a better herd sire(s). Select herd sires which will allow you to meet your goals and be

willing to pay for superior animals.

General

- Obtain forage analysis of your hay supply to determine supplement needs.
- Feed hay in areas where mud is less of a problem. Consider preparing a feeding area with gravel over geotextile fabric.
- Increase feed as the temperature drops, especially when the weather is extremely cold and damp. When temperature drops to 15°F, cattle need access to windbreaks.
- Provide water at all times. Cattle need 5 to 11 gallons per head daily even in the coldest weather. Be aware of frozen pond hazards. Keep ice "broken" so that cattle won't walk out on the pond trying to get water.
- Watch for rubbing or other signs of lice and treat if needed.
- Consider renovating and improving pastures with legumes, especially if they have poor stands of grass or if they contain high levels of the fescue endophyte. Purchase seed and get equipment ready this month.

Learning the Modern Cowboy Lingo

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

In the early 1970's, Dr. Fred Thrift and others wrote a UK Fact Sheet entitled "Learn the Modern Cowboy Lingo". It was well done and designed to inform producers of the changing terminology in the beef business, especially for breeding values. With all the emerging EPD values and other new terminology that we are now deluged with, it is difficult to keep up.

The United States Department of Agriculture recognized the need for a uniform language in feeder calf trading and rolled out the USDA feeder calf grades in the mid 70's. At that time, we referred to calves differently in different areas of the country. The common lingo was a No. 1 Okie, Choice English cross, No. 1 crossbred or maybe even a South Mississippi Yellow Hammer with a beestrings (I'm still not sure what kind of calf that was). USDA grades describe calves in terms of frame and muscling. That means that 6-weight Medium One (Medium frame, No. 1 muscle thickness) Angus steers should be very similar in any part of the country. It's good to have a standardized language but I still miss the good old days.

The jargon that many of us have used can be both confusing and amusing. For instance, "That *Baldy* heifer with a *touch of ear* may need to be *wormed*. I thought she would *freshen* this spring but I saw her *bulling* this morning. She's out of that old *muley* cow over there that is *smooth-mouthed* and been *dry* for the last year. I guess she's got *hardware* now but she's been a *good 'un*. I kept another one of her calves, was going to *cut* him but decided he wouldn't bring anything as a steer so I just kept him for a *heifer bull*."

Now, here's some help for those of you that don't hang out at the feedstore or stockyard:

- *baldy* – white face with solid black or red body e.g. black baldy
- *touch of ear* – some Brahman influence
- *wormed* – actually dewormed (with an anthelmintic). We don't want to give them worms.
- *freshen* – start to give milk after calving
- *bulling* – in heat (showing the signs of estrus)
- *muley* – polled, not horned

- *smooth-mouthed* – no, it doesn't describe a politician. It's a cow with its lower, front teeth worn down, usually over ten years of age. Don't bother to look for the upper teeth.
- *dry* – not producing milk, has nothing to do with the weather
- *hardware* – presence of a metal item like a nail in the rumen or reticulum (fore stomach)
- *good 'un* – means absolutely nothing
- *cut* – castrate, remove testicles. Sometimes considered a form of brain surgery.
- *heifer bull* – a bull that is acceptable to breed to yearling heifers because of expected calving ease.

This has been the kind of year when many people describe their hay's nutritive quality thusly – “it'll beat a snowball”. That isn't very definitive either but does remind me of other terms like “holler (hollow) horn” and “holler tail” which were used a couple of generations ago.

I had an older gentleman that worked for me in Mississippi when I was a new Ph.D. in 1974. His nickname was “Jaybird” and he was telling me that a poor doing cow had “holler horn”. He said that you could just drill a hole in their horn and it would relieve that pressure on the brain and they would be cured. I expressed my disbelief and he said “It works. My pappy had a cow that was down and he didn't have a drill, so he just picked up a 2x4 and knocked a horn off. She got up and ran off”. I allowed that I'd get up and run off too if a wild man got after me with a 2x4. I guess the moral of that story is “don't go to anyone named Jaybird for veterinary advice.”

I actually saw a cow one time that had been “treated” for “holler tail”. The poor old cow looked like she was starving to death and needed some feed. Since I think that many problems are caused by our failure to have adequate nutritional programs, I'd like to share a little poem with you that was frequently used by Warren Thompson and Garland Bastin:

Ode to the Bedraggled Cow

The howling winds of winter came,
The dried up grass was thin,
The farmer looked with troubled eyes,
Bones pushing through my skin.

He called his neighbors near and far to see what all could ail me,
And the things they tried to cure me with made all my courage fail me.
They cut off my horns as you can see these kind well-meaning gents.
They even split my tail and put on all kinds of stinking liniments.

They put on salves of every sort,
And ointments strong and smelly.
They just can't see what's killing me,
It's plain old hollow belly!

Time to Double Check Your Heifer Development Program

Dr. Les Anderson, Beef Extension Specialist, University of Kentucky

The first week of January is an extremely important “check-point” in spring heifer development programs. The key to proper heifer development lies in understanding the factors that influence conception in yearling heifers. One key factor regulating heifer fertility is age at puberty. Most producers don’t consider age at puberty of their heifers to be a major problem, yet few know how many heifers are actually cyclic at the beginning of the breeding season. A Nebraska study demonstrated that the proportion of heifers that were pubertal on the first day of the breeding season varied greatly over 5 consecutive years in a single herd. The percentage of heifers that were pubertal on the first day of the breeding season ranged from only 21% to as high as 64% over the 5-year period. For maximum fertility and reproductive performance, heifers must have had at least one estrus **before** the beginning of the breeding season. Our goal then is to incorporate reproductive management techniques to reduce the age of puberty, increase fertility, and shorten the interval to conception.

One of the largest factors that regulate puberty in the heifer is weight. For puberty to occur, heifers must weigh at least 65% of their mature weight. This weight is referred to as their target weight. Most heifer development programs require that heifers reach their target weight, approximately 65% of their expected mature weight, by the onset of their first breeding season. Because fertility increases until the third estrus after puberty, heifers should reach their target weight at least 30 days before the start of the breeding season. I refer to this date as the target date.

January is the time to determine if your heifers are “on track”. Most yearling heifers will need to reach 700-800 pounds (their projected target weight) by mid-April to ensure high fertility assuming that the heifer breeding season starts about mid-May. Weigh your heifers to determine how much they have left to gain to reach their target weight. If the heifers weighed on average 600 pounds and their target weight is 750 pounds then they will need to gain 150 pounds or 1.5 - 1.6 pounds each day to reach their target weight by mid-April. Heifers should reach a BCS of 5.0-5.5 by their target date.

The next important phase in heifer development occurs one month prior to the start of the breeding season. At this time, heifers should be vaccinated (Vibrio fetus, Leptospirosis, and the respiratory disease complex which includes PI₃, BRSV, BVD and IBR; modified-live vaccine is preferred), dewormed, and pelvic area measurements should be obtained. Heifers with small pelvic areas and especially large heifers will small pelvic areas tend to have greater difficulty calving. Now is the time to contact you local veterinarian to schedule this pre-breeding work.

Producers should consider estrus synchronization and/or AI. Estrus synchronization and AI has many advantages which include: higher pregnancy rates, heavier, more uniform calves at weaning, and increase production and labor efficiency. The greatest advantage of AI is the ability to use superior, more predictable sires. Since a majority of calving problems in a herd occur when calving first-calf heifers, it seems only logical to synchronize and AI your heifers to proven calving ease bulls. Contact your local AI technician to schedule a time to breed your heifers. Next month, I will discuss various methods for estrus synchronization.

Proper heifer development is one of the key components to profitability in a beef cattle operation. Understanding the principles of heifer development can enable producers to incorporate management techniques to improve the efficiency of the operation.

Selecting for Calving Ease and Disposition

Dr. Darrh Bullock, Beef Extension Specialist, University of Kentucky

Buying a bull that fits your needs and operation is very important. For this reason, there is no such thing as “the perfect bull”, for all farms because what would be considered as the best bull for one operation will be different for another. Looking at all of the traits for each bull and determining which one best fit your needs is the right approach. Using tools such as Expected Progeny Differences will help in this decision making process.

When visiting with Kentucky beef producers there are two traits that seem to be important to most: calving ease and temperament. Although both of these traits are associated with added convenience, they also have a great impact on production. Anyone that has ever assisted the delivery of a calf that is too large for the pelvic cavity of a heifer would like to avoid that in the future if possible. Not only is it an unpleasant experience, but it can result in the death of the calf and/or heifer and when the heifer survives it results in delayed rebreeding or she does not rebreed at all. The best way to avoid this problem is to select bulls that have higher values for calving ease EPD while maintaining adequate performance for other traits.

When selecting bulls to provide calving ease, it is important not to forget about the other traits that impact you economically. Choose a bull that is going to give you adequate calving ease, while maintaining enough growth to positively impact sale weights and the level of milk to fit your environment. Another piece of advice is to select based on EPDs alone and not on the shape of the bull. Research has shown that calf shape does not significantly impact calving difficulty.

The other trait of special interest to many Kentucky producers is temperament or docility; how gentle is the bull or his offspring? This is an important trait for farm safety, but it also has an impact on production. Research has shown that cattle with a poor disposition do not gain as well and have reduced carcass performance. Some breeds have EPDs for this trait, but most do not. This is often a trait that must be determined by interacting with the bull prior to purchase. Many breeds are becoming more interested in developing docility EPDs and I think that in the future this will be a trait that will be more easily selected for using EPDs.

Whether your selection is based on added convenience, added production or both; selecting for calving ease and disposition in beef cattle can have positive affects when done right.

Kentucky Beef Cattle Market Update

Kenny Burdine, Beef Extension Specialist, University of Kentucky

Happy New Year! Kentucky feeder cattle prices were just a shade softer in December than November, closing the year out at the lowest prices since the first quarter. Markets are generally pretty quiet through the Christmas and New Year’s holidays as many yards are not selling. As markets re-open in January, they will be digesting two major reports. First, the semi-annual cattle inventory report should help us understand how many cattle moved in the southeast during 2007 as a result of the drought. Secondly, this month will also bring the final 2007 crop production report and ending stock numbers for the grain markets, which have major implications for feeder cattle markets.

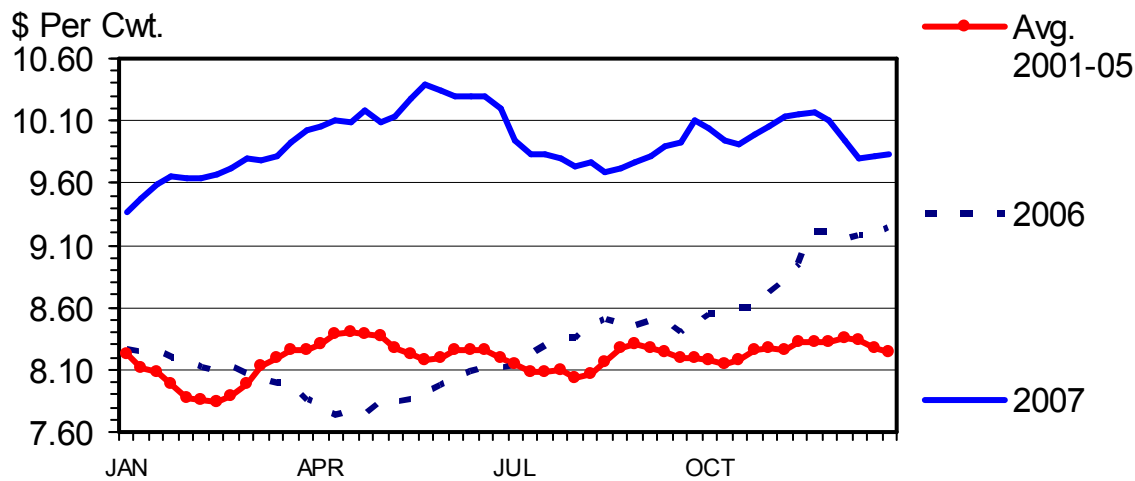
This month, I thought it would be interesting to shift gears and talk about by-product values in the beef markets. They don’t get a lot of attention, but they have a clear impact on the cattle markets and they were

very friendly in 2007. The chart below shows that hide and offal values averaged well over \$9 per cwt. last year. This is much higher than 2006, and the average of the previous five years.

The reported by-product value represents everything besides the actual carcass products. This includes the hide, skin, liver, and tallow. Some of the recent strength has been due to strong spillover demand from the oil markets. It is also important to recognize that much of the by-product market is export driven, and this market has been strong recently as well. As with all exports products, a weak US dollar makes those products relatively cheaper to importing countries.

STEER HIDE AND OFFAL VALUE

Live Animal Basis, Weekly



Livestock Marketing Information Center

Roberts Agricultural Commodity Market Report

Mike Roberts, Commodity Marketing Agent, Virginia Tech University

LIVE CATTLE futures on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) closed up on Monday with deferreds off. DEC'07LC futures finished up \$0.275/cwt at \$92.875/cwt but \$1.525/cwt lower than last week at this time. The FEB'08LC contract closed at \$95.625/cwt, up \$0.150/cwt but \$1.500/cwt lower than last Monday. Higher wholesale beef prices were supportive early Monday. Cash cattle can expect firm prices if further gains are posted in futures. USDA's 5-area price was about \$0.50/cwt lower this week over last at \$92.68/cwt for steers and \$92.56/cwt for heifers. USDA reported the choice beef cutout at \$151.69/cwt, up \$2.90/cwt. Some processors alerted sellers they were thinking about cutting production later in the week. USDA placed estimated slaughter at 95,000 head last week compared to 130,000 head a week ago and 121,000 head last year at this time. Even though packers are taking steps to cut back some of that reduction was not on purpose and could be blamed on the winter weather. According to HedgersEdge.com, the average beef plant margin for Monday was estimated at a negative \$35.95/head, \$11.30/head better than last Friday and \$10.80/head better than a week ago. Cash sellers should take profits on these rallying prices. Corn prices are due for a major break if on nothing else but technical selling. If you have to buy corn, buy it; just don't buy too far out. Try to price on the technical breaks.

FEEDER CATTLE contracts at the CME were up on Monday chasing live cattle. JAN'08FC futures closed at \$106.125/cwt, \$0.175/cwt higher than last Friday but \$2.225/cwt lower than last Monday. The MAR'08FC contract finished at \$107.700/cwt, up \$0.250/cwt but \$1.100/cwt lower than a week ago. Fears of colder weather and higher corn started the market out with losses in early trading but higher prices in live cattle produced gains for feeders near week ago levels. Cash feeder average price on the CME for Friday, December 7 was \$106.86/cwt, down \$0.120/cwt. An oversold condition in the JAN'08FC contract provided some support. A contract is said to be oversold with a Relative Strength Index (RSI) of 30 or below. The January 10-day RSI closed at 29.69. The latest CME Feeder Cattle Index for December 6 was noted at \$106.98/cwt, up \$0.10/cwt. Feeder sellers ought to hold off cattle sales until the cold snap breaks if you have pasture. Immediate feed needs may be running short if you haven't priced corn on sags last week. If you did, you might consider trying to price corn on the downside dips as we go through the week.

Sale Date	Weighted Average Price	Change
12/14	\$104.45/cwt	- \$1.02
12/13	\$105.47/cwt	- \$1.15
12/12	\$106.62/cwt	- \$0.26
12/11	\$106.88/cwt	+ \$0.01
12/10	\$106.87/cwt	\$0.01
12/07	\$106.86/cwt	- \$0.12
12/06	\$106.98/cwt	+ \$0.10
12/05	\$106.88/cwt	- \$0.29
12/04	\$107.17/cwt	- \$0.31
	Total Net Change in two weeks	- \$2.72

Feeder sellers should consider selling cattle on these upticks. You might consider holding off on feed purchases except when corn breaks on technical selling.

FARM BILL 2007 (or '08): On another topic not usually seen in this report is the farm bill. On the heels of a new Energy bill, the Senate passed its version of a new \$286 billion farm bill last Friday, December 14th on a 79-14 vote. The Senate version generally keeps current commodity and conservation programs in place. Senate leaders passed the bill after throwing out certain amendments to avoid taking work into the holidays. The House version of a farm bill was passed back in July. The President has promised to veto the legislation as a budget buster. One component kept in the Senate version of the bill would restrict packer ownership, feeding, and otherwise controlling livestock more than 14 days prior to processing. The House version doesn't include this requirement. Also included in the Senate bill is language that reduces producer paper for mandatory country-of-labeling (COOL) while adding additional language that includes poultry to the mandatory reporting requirement. The bill allows all cattle in the U.S. as of January 1, 2008, to qualify for a U.S. origin label. The bill will now go into conference where it will be distilled to a product that will then be sent to the President for signature (or not). These formal negotiations are not expected to take place until everyone is back at work after the holidays (mid-to-late January, 2008). Good luck.