

# OFF THE HOOF

*Kentucky Beef Newsletter – June 2009*

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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*

### Spring-Calving Cow Herd

- The breeding season continues. Observe the cows and bulls! Watch bulls for injury or lameness and change bulls if a high percentage of cows are returning to heat. Record cow breeding dates to determine next year's calving dates and keep records of cows and bulls in each breeding group. Use your IRM Beef Calendar to record breeding dates.
- This is a critical time for getting cows bred. They should be on good pasture with clover and preferably low endophyte levels for the spring breeding season. Keep pastures vegetative by clipping or making hay. Cows should have abundant shade and water; heat stress can ruin the breeding season.
- Keep a good pasture mineral mix, which contains adequate levels of phosphorus, vitamin A, selenium and copper, available at all times.
- Consider a special area for creep grazing calves, or practice "forward grazing", allowing calves to graze fresh pasture ahead of the cows. This can be accomplished by raising an electric wire or building a creep gate.

### Fall-Calving Herd

- Wean calves as soon as pasture quality deteriorates, if not already done.

- Pregnancy test cows if not done previously.
- Cull cows at weaning time
  - Smooth-mouthed cows
  - Cows weaning light weight and/or poor-quality calves
  - Open cows
- Select replacement heifers on the basis of:
  - conformation
  - weaning weight
  - temperament
  - dam and sire records
  - select more than needed to allow for culling after a short breeding season
  - select heifers that will reach their target weight by the beginning of their breeding season

### General

- Pasture should supply adequate energy, protein and vitamins at this time. However, be prepared for drought situations. Don't overgraze pastures so that recovery time will be faster. Overgrazed pastures will recover very slowly during July/August.
- Keep pastures small for rotational grazing so that nutritive quality can be maintained. They should be small enough so cattle do not graze longer than a week. As the season progresses, you need several paddocks to give each properly stocked pasture about 4 weeks' rest.
- Clip grazed-over pastures for weed control and so that seed heads do not irritate eyes. Pastures should be kept in a vegetative state for best quality.
- Finish harvesting excess pasture as hay soon! It should be cut before it becomes too mature. Be sure and replenish your reserves. Try to put up more than you think you will need.
- Control flies. Consider changing insecticides and/or methods of control this year, because insecticide resistant flies may have developed if you have used the same chemical year after year.
- Maintain a clean water supply and check it routinely. Water is extremely important in hot weather.
- Prevent/Control pinkeye
  - consider vaccinating,
  - control flies,
  - clip tall, mature grass,
  - treat problems quickly, inject antibiotics and steroids in infected animal's eyelid or intramuscularly according to product used. Glue patch over eye.

## Another Mystery Solved

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

I would guess that the most common question that is asked of me is “why don’t my calves gain like you say they should?” The answer is generally pretty simple – they don’t gain because you don’t feed them. You cannot give young, growing calves access to something that can generously be described as hay, along with a couple of pounds of concentrate and expect them to do much.

“How much are you feeding them?”

“I’m giving them a bucket every day.”

“How many calves?”

“Twenty”.

Unless that bucket is on a front-end loader, they are not getting much feed.

How much should they get? We should, of course, feed a ration that is balanced for a desired rate of gain. However, let’s simplify that a little bit. We can estimate that it takes about 6 or 7 pounds of feed for every pound of gain. So multiply 6 or 7 times your desired rate of gain and you should be in the “ballpark” of what they should consume. For example, a calf gaining about 2.5 lb/day would be eating about 17 pounds of feed.

When calves are fed adequate amounts of a balanced diet, postweaning gains will surprise you. We have been doing feeding demonstrations with weaned calves at UK-Princeton for several years. I will share last year’s data with you.

In the first trial (Table 1) calves were fed 51 days after weaning and sold in a CPH-45 sale. They received free-choice hay with one of the supplements shown.

**Table 1. Preconditioning fall-born calves – 2008.**

Item	Concentrate mixture		
	66% soyhulls 34% corn gluten feed	82% soyhulls 18% DDGS	69% soyhulls 31% Modified DG
Head	15	15	15
Initial Wt.	607	604	611
Final Wt.	787	792	784
ADG	3.5	3.7	3.4
Concentrate intake, lb.	18	18	20

The next trial demonstrated the effect of the level of concentrate intake on gain of preconditioning calves for 45 days after weaning. Calves were fed a mixture of two-thirds soyhulls and one-third corn gluten feed (Table 2).

**Table 2. Preconditioning spring-born calves – 2008.**

Item	Concentrate mixture (% Bodyweight)			
	1.5	2.0	2.5	Ad lib
Head	10	10	10	9
Initial Wt.	618	603	613	614
Final Wt.	720	719	752	775
ADG	2.27	2.58	3.09	3.58
Concentrate fed, lb.	9	12	15	22

Calves will gain if you feed them a balanced ration and practice good feedbunk management. Keep feed fresh and clean.

And another thing, why is feed always described according to protein level? If someone is asked what they are feeding their cattle, they'll say something like "I'm feeding that 12 percent feed". Protein is not the only thing that a cow needs. Energy is just as likely to be a problem. Of course, you don't even find energy on the feed tag. Maybe if we understood that energy is more limiting on performance than protein, we would feel comfortable feeding higher levels of feed to our calves and not think of everything as a protein supplement.

Similarly, we are influenced greatly by the level of calcium on the mineral supplement. It's listed first so it must be the most important. Right? Not necessarily. It is listed first because it is the most abundant in the mixture. Calcium – from calcium carbonate – or ground limestone or – crushed rock is not very expensive. That is not usually critical. We should pay special attention to the trace minerals like copper, selenium, zinc, etc. I hope that we are making progress on clearing up the "mystery" of purchasing minerals with our efforts with the Beef IRM mineral program.

### **Crossbreeding - Back to the Future**

David A. Daley, California State University, Chico (Proceedings of the Beef Improvement Federation 41st Annual Research Symposium April 30 - May 3, 2009, Sacramento, California, USA)

Three years ago I was invited to address BIF regarding heterosis and how we have either ignored or forgotten the value of systematic crossbreeding to improve profitability in beef cattle production systems. In the interim period since that presentation, I am even more convinced that this incredible genetic resource has been under-utilized and devalued. At a time when all of our input costs have increased dramatically, and the value of cow efficiency is paramount, we continue to find arguments against using crossbreeding primarily centered on the concepts of consistency and marketability. Clearly, there are specific instances in the commercial cattle sector where heterosis has been used effectively. I would argue, however, that the potential is far from realized. In fact, in the past few years, we seem to have drifted away from crossbreeding to more traditional straightbred programs that intend to focus on phenotypic consistency and end product, but not necessarily on profitability.

Is there a rationale explanation for our unwillingness to take advantage of a proven technique to enhance economic return? In my previous paper I outlined the "top ten" reasons that we have failed to capitalize on this important genetic attribute:

1) A cultural bias that clearly reflects "purebreds" are better! If for no other reason than they have a registration paper. Society, at many levels, rewards purity. Is your dog registered? Does your quarter horse gelding have papers? How far can you trace your ancestry? Please don't misunderstand - - - there is

certainly value associated with that record, particularly our ability to track performance and predict genetic potential of purebreds. But being purebred should not be a presumption of superiority.

2) Our predilection for single trait selection focusing on "bigger is better". The beef cattle industry seems to choose a trait of importance and then put an inordinate amount of pressure on that trait, ignoring genetic antagonisms. If a 90 pound yearling EPD is good, 100 must be better! It is intuitive! We have already done frame, growth (weight of all kinds), milk, and carcass traits (both ribeye and marbling). I sometimes have to ask myself, "so what is the trait of the year this time?" It is akin to the "flavor of the month" at the local ice cream shop. And because often have chosen relatively highly heritable traits, we have not needed to crossbreed to achieve those goals. The subtle, and cumulative improvement that heterosis provides does not lend itself to maximums.

3) We have decided that measuring outputs is more meaningful than measuring inputs, as well as easier to do. It is certainly easier to measure calf performance on an individual basis, rather than all costs associated with that production. "I can weigh them at weaning quicker than I can determine differences in treatment costs over time."

4) Uniform phenotypes for qualitative traits (color) have a distinct and real marketing advantage that is difficult to ignore. That does not mean you cannot have uniformity of color within a crossbreeding program, but the widespread and indiscriminate planning (or lack thereof) of many crossbreeding programs certainly gave us some interesting marketing challenges. Generally, it is easier to produce a uniform color in straightbred programs.

5) Heterosis is very difficult to visualize and even more difficult to measure. Because heterosis is expressed as a small net positive in many traits we do not know it when we see it. Slight changes in morbidity, age at puberty, conception rate and significant changes in longevity are not easily observed. However, we all know when calves gain faster in the feedlot.

6) The presentation of complicated crossbreeding systems as a "normal practice" to diverse cattle operations, especially the countless small beef herds in the United States. Many of the systems that we teach as part of standard animal breeding or beef production courses have very limited application in the real world. Most beef herds are too small to implement the "standard systems".

7) Our penchant for telling people how to modify their environment in order to "get heavier calves, higher percent calf crop and more total pounds", rather than how to increase net return. How many new supplementation programs can you develop in order to get your heifers bred or wean bigger calves? In fact, we can recommend programs for non-cycling females.....you just have to pay for it and then pass those genetics to the next generation! Heterosis provides some improvement in traits at relatively little cost. However, we have obscured the opportunity for producers to focus on those traits, because they are so busy masking differences with artificial environments.

8) Historically, there has been active resistance to crossbreeding from some traditional marketing outlets, some purebred producers and (in some cases) breed associations. I would like to commend many of the associations who, quite recently, have taken the risk of suggesting where their animals fit most effectively in crossbreeding programs.

9) Inappropriate use of breed diversity. Nothing undermines crossbreeding more quickly than the unplanned "Heinz 57" or "Breed of the Month Club" approach. For those who were willing to experiment

in crossbreeding, there was often very poor planning of the combination of breeds and the selection within those breeds.

10) Our industry and University systems have focused on individual trait measurement for over fifty years. We have done a very poor job of incorporating real world economics into our models. We have EPD's for a plethora of traits . . .and we are adding more! Economic indices are starting to catch up, but we are still behind. Has anyone thought about measuring return per acre or return on investment? We have had a disconnect between agricultural economists and animal science that has not been well bridged. We tend to think lineally rather than laterally, which has reduced the application of innovative crossbreeding.

As I review this list, I am convinced that the primary drawback (among all of the others), is #3 . . . the focus on measuring outputs rather than inputs. With a few notable exceptions, all of the individual animal traits we measure reflect "bigger, faster, more". And certainly, the glamour traits of yearling weight, ribeye area, marbling - - - have accelerated at a rapid pace. You can make very rapid genetic progress in these highly heritable traits by direct selection within a breed. Therefore, many people fail to see the value of crossbreeding. The value in crossbreeding is often underestimated because it has a small positive effect on many different traits that are lowly heritable and difficult to measure. Frequently, maternal heterosis (the value of the crossbred cow) is about decreasing inputs as much as it is about increasing output. For example, longevity, livability and disease resistance are traits that impact the input side of the equation as much as the output. Our industry has been on a mission to improve product quality and quantity, focusing on carcass traits. We finally were paying attention to our consumers - - a good thing! Unfortunately, that effort has been on a per animal basis rather than per unit of input. Do we ever ask ourselves how our long term selection programs affect the profitability of commercial producers?

When EPD's became a marketing tool rather than a genetic improvement tool, a great deal was lost from beef cattle breeding. There was a decision to chase numbers in order to have the "latest and best", and function was often ignored. Purebred breeders were constantly looking for the newest genetics. We utilized lightly proven sires throughout the breeds, before we tested them carefully. And now look . . . . . how many genetic defects are we tracking in each major beef breed? A quick check of most of the major breeds websites are somewhere between five and ten! And we discouraged crossbreeding, while we simultaneously narrowed the genetic base of many of the major breeds. Does that make sense?

Our current "trait of the month/selection effort" moves us in the direction of genomics. I applaud the scientists who do the work and I see the eventual long term value. But as a commercial cattleman, if I am not capitalizing on crossbreeding - - - a simple, inexpensive tool to make genetic progress - - - should I really be worrying about gene markers? Do I really want to select for a marker that may only explain a very small part of the variation of a complex trait ---a trait significantly influenced by genotypic/environmental interactions. If I had a goal for gene markers it would not be for markers that identify highly heritable traits. I can make progress with those traits based on good old fashioned selection programs. The gene markers that I would like to see are for things like disease resistance, fertility, longevity - - - those traits that make the biggest difference in profitability. Let's not get sidetracked on what determines maximum sustained profit for all segments of the industry. It is not the amount of pounds of product per head. It is amount of product per unit of input cost.

Every few years we seem to find another EPD or measurement to chase. When are we going to focus on maximum sustained profit per unit of input? Three years ago we began a study/field trial evaluating the impact of crossbreeding in a vertically coordinated beef system, where premiums are paid for carcass merit. Approximately 600 predominantly Angus based cows were exposed to either Angus or Hereford

bulls under extensive range conditions. DNA was used to determine parentage at weaning, and only those calves that could be definitively matched to a single sire were used in the data analysis. Collaborators included Harris Ranch Beef Company (Coalinga, CA); Lacey Livestock of Independence, CA and the American Hereford Association.

Presently we are close to collecting the third year of feedlot/carcass data and the final report should be completed by summer, 2009. However, preliminary results are not surprising. As we measured direct heterosis (heterosis of the calf), there was a small positive advantage in most traits. In particular, crossbred (F1) calves were slightly heavier at weaning, had a slight advantage in feedlot gain and feed efficiency and a lower cost of gain. The crossbred calves had lower quality grades, partially offsetting the economic advantage in the other segments. However, in the first two years of the study, there was a consistent economic advantage to crossbreeding, even factoring the reward for differences in quality grade to the Angus sired calves. The data is not surprising and mirrors decades of research. Although direct heterosis (heterosis of the calf) is important, we must remember that the true value is maternal hybrid vigor - the incredible value of the crossbred cow. If the data in year three is consistent, it appears there will be an economic advantage in vertically coordinated beef production systems from direct heterosis of the F1. However, the most important economic return will be when the crossbred cow enters the production system. In particular, the potential increase in lifetime productivity and longevity are key to maximum sustained profit per unit of input.

In academia, it seems that we tend to want to make the simple complex. The commercial beef business is faced with a very difficult challenge to maintain long term profitability and viability. There are countless battles (unrelated to cattle breeding) in order to survive and be profitable in the long term. We need to keep cattle breeding simple. We have wonderful within breed selection tools (EPD's). We have the ability to capitalize on breed differences and capture both heterosis and breed complementarity through crossbreeding. Designing simple, long term breeding programs to capture direct and maternal heterosis, while capitalizing on maternal and terminal lines, is a significant step in attempting to maximize sustained profit.

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## **There's Gold in Them Hills: Bourbon Distillers Grains**

*Dr. Jeff Lehmkuhler, Extension Beef Cattle Specialist, University of Kentucky*

Recently I have had the opportunity to work with one of Kentucky's unique, well-known industries. As with anything, this stemmed from a desire, or rather a necessity, to learn the local lingo. Slop, wet cake, distillers grains, and bourbon all come together in this industry to which I am referring. Having experience with fuel ethanol wet distillers grains derived from corn, my experience with bourbon distillers grains was zero. Tommy Yankey, Anderson County Extension Agent, and I have been able to get a look behind the scenes at a couple of bourbon plants on the Bourbon Trail to increase our knowledge and understanding as to what processes are involved in converting grains to alcohol as well as the residue that makes its way back on to many Kentucky farms as livestock feed. We've been able to set up a short feeding

demonstration with Glenn Williams, Laurel County Extension Agent, as well as a storage demonstration in Anderson County due to collaborations with the bourbon industry and those involved with marketing the spent grains. I've come to realize that Kentucky may have a gold nugget in this regional feed source if we can overcome a few logistical challenges.

The recent fuel ethanol industry boom is based primarily on corn in much of the US. The distillers grains that come from this industry are a high quality feedstuff with conventional wet distillers grains having actually a slightly higher energy value than corn. Researchers at the University of Nebraska recently reported that wet distillers grains has 130% the energy value of dry-rolled corn when fed to growing cattle on a 70% forage diet (Nuttelmann et al., 2009 Nebraska Beef Cattle Report). Previously, researchers from Nebraska had reported that wet distillers grains were 128% the energy value of corn when fed to calves and 169% when fed to yearling cattle compared to dry-rolled corn in finishing diets (Larson et al., 1993, J. Anim Sci.). Other researchers have also indicated that the energy content of wet distillers grains may be greater than corn, but there is variability depending on the nutritive quality of the distillers grains, level fed, and the diet composition.

Bourbon wet distillers grains are derived from a grain bill that is predominately corn, but other cereal grains such wheat or rye may be used along with malted barley. Barley distillers grains has been shown to have lower digestibility than other small cereal grains due to the husk of the grain (Mustafa et al., J. Sci. Food Agric., 2000). Preston updated a table of the nutritive value of various feedstuffs which was published in Beef Magazine in 2009 reporting dried barley distillers grains having 77% TDN with dried distillers grains derived from corn being 99% TDN and corn listed at 88% TDN. The energy values were approximately 70-75% for the barley distillers grains compared to that of the corn distillers grains. This simply illustrates that not all distillers grains are the same.

In Table 1 nutritive values for samples from our demonstration projects are presented along with values for wet distillers grains derived from corn as reported by Kaiser in 2005. Samples collected from a few of the distilleries in our demonstration work have come back containing 82-84% TDN. Holt and Pritchard in 2004 reported dry matter and crude protein levels of 31% and 36%, respectively for corn-based wet distillers grains. Bourbon distillers wet grains are very similar to that of corn-based fuel ethanol plants from a nutrient profile, but dry matter content can vary dramatically depending upon the plant and process being utilized to separate the thin stillage or slop from the grains. It is expected that the energy value will be slightly lower than that of corn-based ethanol distillers grains due to the malted barley and lower digestibility of the barley husk. Preston reported corn to have an NEm and NEg of 0.98 Mcal/lb and 0.65 Mcal/lb which is essentially identical for the wet bourbon distillers grains samples we've submitted. It is important to keep in mind that the chemical analysis does not equate exactly to performance. In other words, the biological value may be greater or lower than what is reported on paper. A good example of this is soyhulls. The typical TDN and energy values often reported are less than that observed when fed to cattle on a high grain diet. On paper, however, the bourbon wet distillers grains have a reported energy value similar to that of corn.

Table 1. Nutrient values of bourbon wet distillers grains.

<b>Nutrient level</b>	<b>Bourbon Wet Distillers</b>	<b>Corn Wet Distillers<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>DM, %</b>	<b>25-33</b>	36
<b>CP, %</b>	<b>28-33</b>	27
<b>TDN, %</b>	<b>82-85</b>	NR
<b>NEm, mcal/lb</b>	<b>0.97-0.99</b>	NR
<b>NEg, mcal/lb</b>	<b>0.66-0.68</b>	NR
<b>Ca, %</b>	<b>0.08-1.92</b>	0.1
<b>P, %</b>	<b>0.61-0.91</b>	0.9

<sup>1</sup> Kaiser. 2005. Proceedings of the 4-State Dairy Nutrition & Management Conference. Means of 51 samples from 3 ethanol plants over a 9 month period.

So what have I tried to lay the ground work for in the above paragraphs? First, wet distillers grains, fuel or human consumption derived, is both an energy and protein source in cattle diets. Secondly, wet bourbon distillers grains has a nutritive value quite similar to reported values for wet distillers grains derived from corn-based ethanol with an expected energy value that may be slightly lower. Kentucky has a great local feed source available for beef cattle producers and in the future we'll discuss how one might utilize this regional feed source in cow and growing / finishing diets. In the mean time, keep your fences mended and look towards the sky for rain.

## **Kentucky Beef Cattle Market Update**

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

I wanted to focus our discussion this month on the potential impact of the next Cooperatives Working Together (CWT) buyout on the beef industry. This topic has lead to many questions since the first of the year and we now have more information. In early May, CWT announced that it had accepted bids to remove 103,000 dairy cows from production. This is the largest buyout in their history. Audits have already begun, so slaughter should also start fairly quickly. Slaughter is expected to be complete by late July or early August if things run as expected.

Let's start by putting the buyout in perspective. The May milk production report estimated that there were 9.3 million US dairy cows in production during the first quarter of 2009. So, CWT would remove a little over 1% of the US dairy herd. While 1% sounds very small, it is important to remember that we will be concentrating an additional 103,000 cows for slaughter right in the summer time period.

In general terms, this is what I would expect. The longer term impact on feeder cattle and cull cow prices should be slightly positive (although very small). The reason being is that once these cows work through the system, there will be a slightly smaller dairy herd, which also means a few less dairy steers on the market each year. In the short term, I expect very little impact on feeder cattle prices. Feeder cattle on the market now are likely to come off feed well after these cows are harvested. So, the big remaining question is the short-term impact on cull cow prices.

During the months of June and July of 2008, USDA estimated that commercial cow slaughter was slightly greater than one million cows. So these 103,000 cows would be roughly 10% of last year's cow slaughter during those two months. Further, it is likely that dairy producers will cull very hard this year, leading to further increases in cow slaughter this summer. Clearly, the supply impact of these two factors could push prices noticeably downward as we work through these cows, holding all other factors constant.

Of course, in economics, we are never really able to hold everything else constant. So, I also want to mention some factors that may lessen the impact of this buyout. First, it is likely that the slaughter of these buyout cows will span more than two months, thereby spreading them out and reducing some of the weekly impact. Second, supply will likely shift as a result. If prices do weaken for a period of time, beef producers may delay moving cull cows and / or we may see decreased imports of trim to offset some of the additional production. Third, 2008 was a big year for cow slaughter due to drought and beef cow culling. If weather doesn't change drastically, 2009 beef cow slaughter will likely be less than 2008. Finally, cow slaughter is only a portion of total beef production. So, a 10% change in cow slaughter will actually result in a much smaller change in total beef production when steers, heifers, and bulls are also considered. Nonetheless, I would expect some impact this summer and encourage beef producers to watch cull cow markets a little closer than they typically might.

## **Roberts Agricultural Commodity Market Report**

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

LIVE CATTLE futures on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) struggled on Monday. The JUNE'09LC contract closed at \$80.525/cwt; down \$0.800/cwt and \$2.000/cwt lower than last report. The AUG'09LC contract closed off \$0.175/cwt at \$81.650/cwt and \$1.475/cwt lower than Monday before last. DEC'09LC futures closed at \$89.875/cwt; down \$0.150/cwt and \$1.025/cwt lower than last report. Higher grain prices; lower beef cutout values; spreading out of June and October into the August contract; and seasonal trends weighed on prices. Early Monday USDA put the Choice Beef cutout at \$142.88/cwt; off \$1.23/cwt and \$4.27/cwt lower than two weeks ago. Cash cattle were off a range of \$0.50-\$1.00/cwt. The USDA 5-area average was placed at \$84.36/cwt on Monday. Feedlots are calculated to be losing from \$3.50-\$4.50/cwt; below the \$89-\$91/cwt needed to break even. According to HedgersEdge.com average packer margins were lowered \$27.05/head from this time last week. The average processor margin was placed at a positive \$7.90/head based on the average buy of \$85.00/cwt vs. the average breakeven of \$85.63/cwt. Wait another week or at least until profit taking in the corn market occurs later this week to price anymore feed.

FEEDER CATTLE at the CME finished down on Monday. AUG'09FC futures finished at \$100.175/cwt; off \$1.575/cwt and \$1.650/cwt lower than last report. The OCT'09FC contract closed at \$100.675/cwt; down \$1.125/cwt. Sell stops amid profit taking, lower live cattle, soft cash feeders, and bear spreading pressured prices. The latest CME Feeder Cattle Index for May 28 was placed at \$100.52/cwt; up \$0.14/cwt and \$1.15/cwt higher than week-before-last. It is still a good idea to hold feeders to heavier weights if you have good pasture.