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IRM Joins the Social Network

Lori Porter, UK IRM Coordinator

The University of Kentucky Beef IRM Coordinating Committee is proud to announce that UK Beef IRM is available on Facebook and Twitter.

See the Beef IRM page on Facebook® http://www.facebook.com/pages/Lexington-KY/Ky-Beef-IRM/257945233211?ref=nf

or follow Beef IRM on Twitter http://twitter.com/ukbeefirm

Become a fan of UK Beef IRM and follow our announcements on Twitter.

Timely Tips

Dr. Roy Burris, University of Kentucky Beef Specialist

Spring-Calving Cows

The spring calving season should be in full swing now, top priority should be to get a live calf and keep cows in sufficient body condition to rebreed early. Calving areas should be accessible and as clean and as free of mud as possible. Pastures which have good sod and are close to handling facilities work best.

• Check cows at least twice daily and first-calf heifers more frequently than that. Be ready to assist those not making progress after 1 to 2 hours of hard labor. Chilled calves should be dried and warmed as soon as possible.
• See that each calf gets colostrum within an hour of birth, or administer colostrum (or a commercial colostrum replacement) with an esophageal feeder, if needed.
• Identify calves with ear tags and/or tattoos while calves are young and easy to handle and record birthdate and Dam ID. Commercial male calves should be castrated and implanted as soon as possible. Registered calves should be weighed in the first 24 hours.
• Watch for calf scours! If scours become a problem, move cows which have not calved to a clean pasture. Be prepared to give fluids to scouring calves that become dehydrated. Consult your veterinarian for advice and send fecal samples to diagnostic lab to determine which drug therapy will be most effective. Try to avoid feeding hay in excessively muddy areas to avoid contamination of the dams’ udders.
• Separate cows that have calved and increase their feed. Energy supplementation to cows receiving hay is necessary to prepare them for rebreeding. For example, a 1250 lb cow giving 25 lb/day of milk would need about 25 lb of fescue hay and 5 lb of concentrate daily to maintain condition. If you need to go from a condition score of 4 to 5, you will need to add about 2 more lb of concentrate. Cows must be in good condition to conceive early in the upcoming breeding season.
• Continue grass tetany prevention. Be sure that the mineral mix contains magnesium and that cows consume adequate amounts. You can feed the UK Beef IRM High Magnesium mineral.
• Plan to vaccinate calves for clostridial diseases (Blackleg, Malignant Edema) as soon as possible. You might choose to do this at the prebreeding working in late April or early May.
• Prepare bulls for the breeding season. Increase feed if necessary to have bulls in adequate condition for breeding.
• Obtain yearling measurements on bulls and heifers this month (weight, height, pelvic area, scrotal circumference, ultrasound data, etc.) if needed for special sales. Heifers should reach their target weight (65% of mature weight) by the breeding season.
• Finalize plans for your spring breeding program. Purchase new bulls at least 30 days before the breeding season – demand performance records and check health history including immunizations. Use visual evaluation and expected progeny differences (EPD’s) to select a bull that fits your program. Order semen now, if using artificial insemination.

Fall-Calving Cows

• Bull(s) should be away from the cows now!
• Creep feed calves with grain, by-products or high quality forage. Calves will not make satisfactory gains on the dam’s milk alone after about 4 mos. of age – since there isn’t much pasture in March, fall calves need supplemental nutrition. Consider creep grazing on wheat pasture, if available. Calves can also be early-weaned.
• Calves intended for feeders should be implanted.
• Plan to pregnancy check cows soon.

General

• Repair fences, equipment and handling facilities.
• Renovation and fertilization of pastures should be completed.
• If you have a dry, sunny day, use chain-link harrow to spread manure in areas where cattle have overwintered. This may be done in conjunction with renovation.
• Watch for lice and treat if needed.
• Start thistle control. They can be a severe problem in Kentucky pastures. Chemical control
must be done early to be effective.

I Miss “Jaybird”…..Sometimes.
Dr. Roy Burris, Beef Extension Specialist, University of Kentucky

Did you ever meet someone that you thoroughly enjoyed being around but you didn’t really know why?
Someone that caused you to never have a dull moment when they were present? I met Jaybird when I
started work in Mississippi. He seemed to always say whatever came to his mind without any “filter” to
process it – and usually with a generous sprinkling of profanity. Yet, no one really seemed to mind. That
was just Jaybird being, well, Jaybird.

I knew that I was in for a special relationship when the station superintendent introduced me to him on my
first day there. It was corn planting time and since Jaybird wasn’t a skilled tractor driver, his job
apparently was to keep the grain boxes on the planter filled. The superintendent was just telling me how
Jaybird would do anything he was told to do. Just to make his point, we pulled up and he asked Jaybird if
all he had to do was to keep the grain box full? Jaybird promptly replied “I don’t see any sweat on your
(bleep) back”. I knew things would be interesting with him around.

We usually got pretty busy around ryegrass planting time. I decided to “promote” Jaybird to tractor driver.
All that I needed was someone to cultipack behind a grain drill. The only tractor left was a 1066
International (slightly oversized for a small cultipacker) which I hooked up and turned Jaybird loose. He
promptly opened the accelerator up and went bouncing around the 25-acre field. He hadn’t gone far until
the linchpin came out and he left the cultipacker behind. Everyone else stopped to see what would happen
next. Nothing. He never looked back and proudly went around the field – sans cultipacker. He passed the
cultipacker and kept going. Then it hit him – that was his cultipacker. He quickly looked to see if we were
watching. We were! He cussed and we laughed. I hooked him up again and asked him to slow down a
little. He did. I think we were “bonding”.

We were getting along well until one Friday afternoon – about quitting time. Jaybird couldn’t wait for
weekends when he got to hunt in the swamps. I put an old chicken snake in Jaybird’s pickup truck then
began to explain to him why he shouldn’t go hunting – too many rattlesnakes! He cussed and told me he
wasn’t “afraid of any (bleep) snake”, but the seed was planted. We watched as Jaybird raised one leg to
get into the seat and the snake flopped out underneath him. For some reason, he couldn’t lower his leg and
he was dancing around, cussin’ and calling me everything he could think of. He told me that he would put
a real rattlesnake in my car when he got the chance. I just told him that I wasn’t afraid of snakes – but it
was years before I quit inspecting a vehicle before I would get in.

I owned a horse that was inappropriately named Pokey. Pokey would take off with you and unload you for
no good reason. I bought him from a man that had his arm in a cast – not my finest moment. Jaybird had
been cultipacking (again) and had lost his billfold in the plowed ground. I had a bright (and entertaining)
thought. I said “Jaybird take Pokey and go look for it”. We saddled up Pokey and Jaybird stepped into the
stirrup. The saddle rolled over a bit but Jaybird rode off – leaning to the left. The rest of the crew and I
hung around just in case the expected happened. After a couple of hours, Jaybird came riding up with a
big smile – he had found his billfold and Pokey was on his best behavior. I think the horse must have liked
Jaybird for some reason – just like I did.
Sometime when you are short-handed, you do things that you wouldn’t normally do – like letting Jaybird use a 15-foot pasture clipper in a pasture full of terrace rows – by himself. It wasn’t long until Jaybird hung the clipper on a terrace and went to the pickup truck to use the two-way radio. He couldn’t operate that very well either. He “keyed the mike” and came through loud and clear, but he wouldn’t take his thumb off the key so someone could answer him. Although everyone, including me, who had another unit were yelling at him to take his thumb off the key, he couldn’t hear us and promptly launched into a cussing episode that was being transmitted to the base unit (office) and across the area. But that was just Jaybird being Jaybird.

Every time something happened to upset Jaybird, he responded by going into a cussin’ tirade. Well, almost every time. There was that one time at the feedlot when, instead of walking around a tractor and feeder-mixer wagon, Jaybird decided to go between them. He stepped up on the PTO shield and it spun out from under him. He came down astraddle the shaft and started bleeding profusely. His co-worker got on the radio and told me that he was taking Jaybird to the emergency room. He explained how the accident happened and that was good enough for me – I told him to take off that I’d cover things. The secretary on the base unit wanted more complete information. He tried to be discreet but finally, in frustration, after being continually pressed for more details, he explained what bodypart Jaybird injured – again to the whole group. I won’t go into details but Jaybird’s voice did seem a little higher and his demeanor was a little quieter – kinda like a gelded horse. Everyone wanted to know what kind of cussin’ fit Jaybird had when he hurt himself – but he was strangely quiet and decided not to curse. I’ll bet he was silently praying for a good outcome.

One time I had four kids for summer help – some kind of government program – and I thought that it was more trouble than it was worth. But I had an amazing idea – why not let Jaybird have a crew to supervise for a change? I sent Jaybird and his “crew” with a tractor and trailer to pick up “lighter knots” from some newly-cleared ground. I didn’t think anything could go wrong yet I worried all day about them. I got back at quitting time and anxiously asked Jaybird how things went. He said “fine”. I pressed a little more “you didn’t have any problems at all?” “Well”, he said, “I ran over one of ‘ems (bleep) foot with the tractor but he didn’t say anything”. I think they were genuinely terrified of him. That ended his time in a supervisory capacity.

I think of Jaybird from time to time. Although it’s been almost thirty years, I miss his kind of honesty. Sometimes, in this age of political correctness, it is refreshing to hear someone say what they really think, even when it was just “Jaybird being Jaybird”.

**Cutting Costs, Reducing Phosphorus Levels for the Beef Cow Herd?**

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

Last month we discussed how knowing the mineral concentrations in forages may provide opportunities to lower mineral expenses. Testing forages are essential in understanding how these forages contribute to the overall mineral balance. I also shared the minimum, average and maximum forage phosphorus concentrations from three states to demonstrate that on average the forage met or exceeded the phosphorus needs for a stocker steer gaining 1.75 lbs/d. In addition, when feeding corn gluten feed or dried distillers grains, the higher concentration of phosphorus in these feeds often equals or exceeds phosphorus consumed from a typical 6% phosphorus mineral supplement.

In the most recent Nutrient Requirements for Beef Cattle (NRC), the recommended dietary phosphorus requirements for cows vary based on stage of production, milk production level, and age. For a mature
cow, phosphorus requirements follow stage of production. Needs increase late in gestation to support skeletal growth of the developing fetus and reach the apex at peak lactation similar to most other nutrients. The NRC lists the dietary phosphorus requirement for a 1,400 lb cow with 20 lb of milk production at peak lactation to be 0.12% for a dry, gestating beef cow that is 7-9 months since calving. This requirement increases to 0.17% during the last trimester and is 0.20% at peak lactation.

The dietary concentrations stated above for phosphorus needs are based on a few general assumptions. Intake of forage is one of these assumptions. It is important to understand that cattle as well as other animals have nutrient needs based on a quantity such as pounds, grams, ounces, etc… and not a percentage. Intake level is an important consideration when thinking about nutrient requirements. For instance let’s look at the requirement for a cow at peak lactation. The NRC table lists dry matter intake for this 1,400 lb beef cow at 30.5 lbs or 2.18% of body weight. By calculation, the amount of phosphorus to be consumed daily to meet her requirement is 28 grams. Now, let’s consider that we have a cow consuming low quality forage with an actual intake of only 1.8% of body weight or 25 lbs of dry matter. The phosphorus concentration in the hay, assuming the same phosphorus availability, would need to be 0.25% phosphorus. On a percentage increase basis, this is a dramatic increase being 25% higher.

When considering mineral supplementation, it is important to understand the sources of these minerals. Recently, producers participating in a nutrition program submitted hay samples for forage analyses. About 100 hay samples from the 2009 hay crop were analyzed with mineral information collected as well. These forage analyses again demonstrate the potential for reducing phosphorus concentrations in mineral supplements as shown in Figure 1. When looking at the distribution from this set of forage samples, it is evident that nearly two thirds of these samples meet the requirements of our beef cow above at peak lactation having a dry matter intake of 1.8% of body weight.

If one is looking to reduce mineral supplementation expenses for beef cows, my advice would be 1) test your forages 2) consider using a 3-4% phosphorus supplement where appropriate 3) do not cut with white salt if intakes are near the targeted level listed on the feed tag 4) make adjustments for feeding of coproducts that may contain high levels of minerals 5) use a high magnesium mineral during times of the year that deficiencies are common rather than year round. Currently, we are assessing the use of a strategic supplementation protocol that minimizes the risk of reduced phosphorus supplementation on fertility while still allowing for the use of reduced phosphorus concentration mineral supplements. The protocol simply follows the phosphorus needs of the cow herd and uses low phosphorus mineral supplements when requirements at their lowest.

Lastly, a word of caution with respect to reducing phosphorus supplementation is needed. Recall from last month and as shown in Figure 1 below, there are forages that do not meet the animal’s requirements and supplementation is necessary. Again, forage testing will minimize the risk of inadvertently inducing deficiencies when considering reducing phosphorus inputs. Lastly, as far as nutrient balance, a 500 lb calf removes approximately the same amount of phosphorus imported onto the farm as a 6% phosphorus mineral offered year round with a 4 oz per day intake.

If you have questions regarding your mineral supplementation program or forage testing, contact your local county agricultural extension agent for more information. I hope spring finds us all soon and here is to a great calving season for 2010.
Mycoplasma Pneumonia-Arthritis Syndrome in Stocker Calves

Dr. Michele Bilderback, Extension Veterinarian, University of Kentucky

Mycoplasma species are unique microorganisms that were first isolated over 100 years ago. Recently one species, Mycoplasma bovis, has emerged as a major cause of Bovine Respiratory Disease Complex (BRDC). It is normally found in the nasal passages of healthy calves but with stress (such as weaning, commingling, shipping or extreme weather), it drops into the lungs and the problems begin. The organism has the unique ability to dodge the immune system and actually suppress the calf’s normal response to disease. Once in the lungs, it can travel to the bloodstream then to joints, organs, and nerves. These calves generally do not look very sick because no endotoxin is produced by the bacteria so calves stay relatively alert with a fair appetite and are seldom treated early. It may take 7-14 days after lung infection before a calf shows dramatic clinical signs and by that time permanent damage has been done to the lungs.

Typical signs of pneumonia due to Mycoplasma bovis are:
1. Late Pneumonia-Usually 3-4 weeks after arrival to the backgrounder/ stocker operation/feedlot or 1-2 weeks after an initial case of pneumonia
2. Moderate fever/Occassional cough
3. Poor recovery with antibiotic treatment
4. May exhibit lameness/Multiple swollen joints (in approximately 20% of cases)
5. Extreme weight loss (Wasting or “cachectic”)
6. Small percentage develop ear infections with drooped ear and sometimes draining pus
Diagnosis of *Mycoplasma* pneumonia is challenging and is usually based on history and clinical signs. It is common to find the organism in nasal secretions and the upper airways of both normal and diseased animals so only affected lung tissue can be used for analysis. Mixed infections with other disease-causing bacteria such as *Mannheimia haemolytica*, *Pasteurella multocida*, and *Histophilus somni* are common in the field.

Response to antibiotic treatment is variable and frequently unrewarding. *Mycoplasma* organisms are very small and have no cell wall so they are resistant to penicillin and other “beta lactams” (Polyflex, Excenel, Excede, Naxcel) that kill bacteria by destroying the cell wall. They are also very capable of mutating (changing their genetic makeup) in order to survive other types of antibiotics. Currently Draxxin, Nuflor Gold and Resflor (available by prescription only) are FDA approved to treat *Mycoplasma* pneumonia. Use of other antibiotics is considered “Extra label” and requires a valid veterinary/client/patient relationship.

The two most important factors to keep in mind regarding treatment are:
1. Early recognition and treatment is crucial.
2. Prolonged treatment is necessary (continuous therapeutic levels for 10-14 days). The feed additive Chlortetracycline (CTC) may be of some benefit as well.

Prevention depends on sound biosecurity and biocontainment practices. Stress plays a major role by causing immunosuppression so sound nutrition, vaccination and management are critical. Disinfect drenching equipment and balling guns between calves. Eliminating exposure by reducing unnecessary traffic through the farm, isolating new arrivals, and treating sick cattle early will help reduce the risk of
disease. Buying preconditioned calves that have been vaccinated for respiratory diseases (especially BVD) and dewormed will help minimize losses to the producer. The *Mycoplasma* vaccine itself is not considered effective and further research must be done to combat this insidious killer.

***REminder***

Grass or “Winter” Tetany time is here. This syndrome most often affects adult lactating cows grazing grass pastures in late winter and early spring (March/April). Feed a 10-15% Magnesium Mineral free choice during this time of year and monitor intake so you do not run out. If you use high mag blocks, put several in the pasture to insure availability. We have already seen several cases of winter tetany at the Livestock Disease Diagnostic Center in the last two weeks so the time to feed high magnesium mineral is now.

**Interesting Results from BEEF® Magazine’s Survey and Some Implications**

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

BEEF Magazine recently conducted a survey of beef producers across the US and reported the results in their Mid February issue. The survey was completed by 966 producers, 3.2% coming from Kentucky. Almost 66% of the respondents were cow/calf producers and 11.5% were seedstock producers; the majority of the remaining operations were stocker, backgrounding, and feeders. This survey did a very nice job of identifying key questions involving genetics in the beef industry; this article will share some of the results and ramifications of those results. For the full survey report go to: [http://beefmagazine.com/genetics/beef-asked-answered-20100301/](http://beefmagazine.com/genetics/beef-asked-answered-20100301/)

Approximately have of seedstock and cow/calf operations were involved in some type of value added program (i.e. CPH-45). This is a trend that has been on the rise and will continue to be a more important part of the beef industry. We have seen a large increase in CPH-45 sales across the state and we are now experiencing more demand for age and source verified cattle.

Seedstock producers were asked “What breed(s) and/or composite seedstock do you currently offer customers?” Just over 60% answered Angus, with Hereford (18.3%), Charolais (12.7%), Simmental (12.7%), Red Angus (11.3%) and Sim-Angus (10.7%) following; all other breeds and composites reported less than 10%. My guess is that these numbers would be similar in Kentucky with a slightly higher percentage of Angus. The majority (52.8%) of respondent’s market 20 bulls or less each season and 47.9% sold for $2,000 or less. However, 42.3% sold for between $2,000 and $3,000. Most bulls are sold through private treaty (64.3%).

When seedstock producers were questioned about what specific traits were important to their customers the ranking was as follows: Disposition, Birth Weight, Hoof and Leg Soundness, Overall Conformation, Weaning Weight, Yearling Weight and Polledness. Other traits were listed, but received lower scores; the most surprising was Black Color was low on the list. I would completely agree that disposition and calving ease are the two traits of greatest importance to Kentucky producers. The information provided by seedstock producers to bull buyers is reflective of the traits they deem as important. Almost 86% provide actual birth weight data on the bull, 76.8% provide Birth Weight EPDs and 59.2% provide Calving Ease Direct EPDs. For making the best selection decision on calving ease this trend should be reversed. The single best tool available for determining the calving ease of a bull is his Calving Ease EPD; if a Calving Ease EPD is not available the next best tool is the Birth Weight EPD. The actual birth weight of a bull is a very poor indicator of his calving ease ability. Many producers use a combination of this information to make their decision; this is not recommended since the Calving Ease EPD takes into account all of the
other pieces of information making it the single best tool used alone. Only a third of the bulls sold had a Breeding Soundness Exam; this is a concern since reproduction is such an important part of the economics of beef production. We can only hope that producers are conducting BSE’s on their bulls prior to the breeding season.

In next month’s Off-the-Hoof we will discuss the results from cow/calf producers.

Kentucky Beef Cattle Market Update
Kenny Burdine, Livestock Marketing Specialist, University of Kentucky

Cattle markets have been steadily trending upward since the first of the year. As I write this, 5wt. feeder steers have been moving around $110 per cwt and and 7wts have been selling in the low-mid $90’s. We are approaching our seasonal price peak for calves, which usually occurs in April or May. For 7 and 8wts, the market typically peaks near the end of the summer. I thought we would focus our discussion this month on backgrounding, since spring is quickly approaching and many backgrounders are already looking to place calves.

Since the first of the year, we have watched the prices for stocker cattle increase, almost on a weekly basis. However, we have also watched summer feeder cattle futures increase as well. For backgrounders, it is this potential buy / sell margin that should drive decisions. Even with prices changing recently, gross margin for adding 300 pounds has been hovering around $250 per head. To be clear, gross margin is the difference between the expected value of a feeder when sold in the future and the current value of a stocker or light feeder now. From this gross margin, we must cover feed, meds, mineral, labor, interest, death loss, and any other expenses incurred during backgrounding. Let’s walk through a quick example.

Last week, 5wt feeder steers averaged about $1.11 on a state average basis. That would put placement value around $610 for a 550# feeder steer. At the time of this writing, the August feeder cattle futures contract was trading around $109 per cwt. While many factors can affect this, I would expect August basis to be around -$8 or -$9 for groups of 8wt feeder steers. Using this as a price expectation, we would expect to sell 850 lb feeders in August for about $100 per cwt. We estimate our gross margin by subtracting the cost of the stocker ($610), from the expected value of the 8wt this summer ($850). This would put our expected gross margin around $240 for cattle placed now to be sold in August.

Now, let’s take this one step further and talk about a target cost of gain. If we expect gross margin to be $240, and we are adding 300 lbs during 5 months, we know our total cost of gain must be $0.80 per pound to break even. Similarly, if we can put those 300 pounds on for $0.70, we can clear $30 per head. And if we can put those pounds on for $0.60, we can clear $60 per head, and so on. As mentioned before, this cost of gain must include all costs, not just feed costs. Backgrounders should constantly look for opportunities in the market to place calves on an expected gross margin that will lead to profits given feed prices and expected cattle performance.

The quick scenario we just worked through was realistic and very timely (at least as of March 9, 2010). However, we clearly run the risk of placing those calves and seeing the market move against us, reducing our gross margin. This is precisely what happens when cattle prices decline after placing calves. Similarly, feed prices could rise, which would increase our expected cost of gain. These are common risks that must be managed by backgrounders year in and year out.
Just as you look for opportunities to place calves at attractive times, also look for opportunities to manage risk. If feed prices appear favorable, consider booking at least a portion of your feed needs. Price risk on feeders can be managed through use of forward contracts, commodity futures and options, or through the relatively new Livestock Risk Protection Insurance. Backgrounding is a margin business, and it’s important to constantly manage those margins to ensure profits.

Roberts Agricultural Commodity Market Report

Mike Roberts, Commodity Marketing Agent, Virginia Tech University

LIVE CATTLE futures on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) were up on Monday with the exception of the March 2010 contract. The APR'10LC contract finished at $91.725/cwt; off $0.200/cwt and $1.500/cwt lower than last week at this time. JUNE'10LC futures were up $0.200/cwt at $90.600/cwt. Traders' anticipation of the "Goldman Roll" - rolling positions into later months - and spreading into far months were supportive. The market lacked direction as prices in many contracts were noted both above and below the last close. Cash cattle were steady to somewhat lower in thin trade with USDA putting the 5-area average at $90.89/cwt; $0.24/cwt lower than last week's report. Talking with several floor sources the give and take in prices comes amid a hope that the spot-April will provide support based on a price discount to last week's cash sales while those who see lower prices think abundant cattle for sale this week and the recent weakness in wholesale beef sales will weigh on prices. USDA on Monday put the choice beef cutout at $150.16/cwt; up $0.14/cwt and $2.78/cwt over last report. According to HedgersEdge.com, the average packer margin was lowered $1.60/hd from last report to a positive $14.35/hd based on the average buy of $91.23/cwt vs. the average breakeven of $92.35/cwt. Feed buyers might have some buying opportunities prior to the March 10 WASDE report.

FEEDER CATTLE at the CME finished up on Monday. MAR'10FC futures finished at $102.100/cwt; up $1.050/cwt and $0.275/cwt higher than last report. The MAY'10FC contract closed up $1.050/cwt at $104.500/cwt and $0.450 cents over last Monday. Fund buying, lower corn prices, and the spot March-long-price-discount to the CME feeder cattle index were supportive influences. Cash feeders were steady-to-weak in light trade in Oklahoma City, down $0.50-$1/cwt. The CME feeder cattle index for February 25 was placed at $101.36/lb; off $0.12/lb and $0.26/lb lower than last report. It might be a good idea to buy some feed on these lower corn prices.