

2007

# Beef ♦ Forage ♦ Range Practices in South Florida

***SURVEY COMPILED BY:***

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***METHOD FOR OBTAINING INFORMATION:***

Information obtained via mailed questionnaires sent through the South Florida Beef-Forage Group; Bridget Carlisle, Extension Agent II, UF/IFAS/Polk County Extension Service

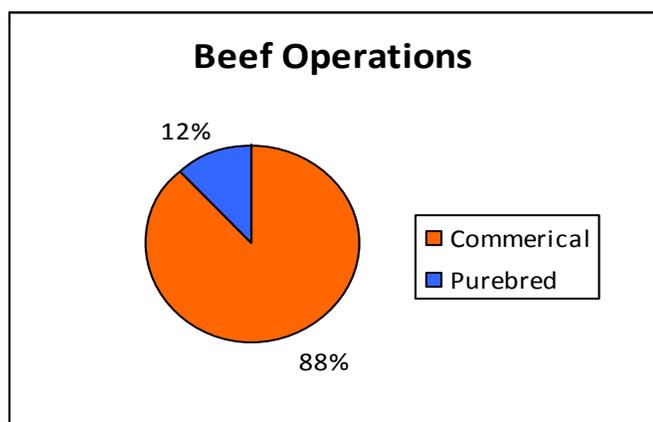
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences  
Cooperative Extension Service  
University of Florida  
Dr. Larry Arrington, Dean

## INTRODUCTION

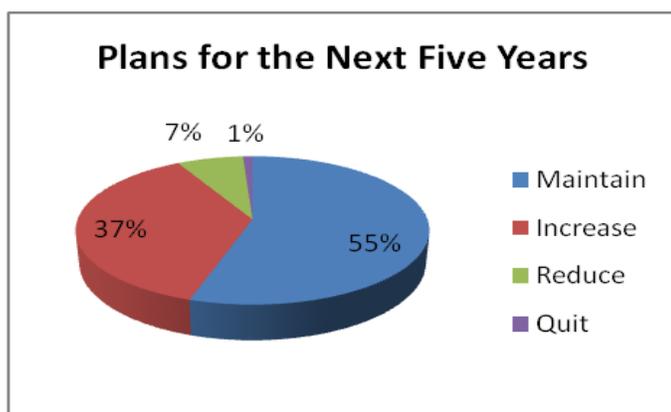
Information gathered from the 2007 Beef-Forage Survey represents South Florida beef cattle producers in Collier, Desoto, Glades, Hardee, Highlands, Hendry, Hillsborough, Lee, Indian River, Manatee, Martin, Okeechobee, Polk, and Sarasota counties.

## ABOUT THE BEEF OPERATION

**Type of Beef Operations:** The beef cattle industry in South Florida is primarily commercial.



**Plans for the Next Five Years:** The results from the survey show that 92% of producers plan to maintain or increase the size of their operations in the next five years.

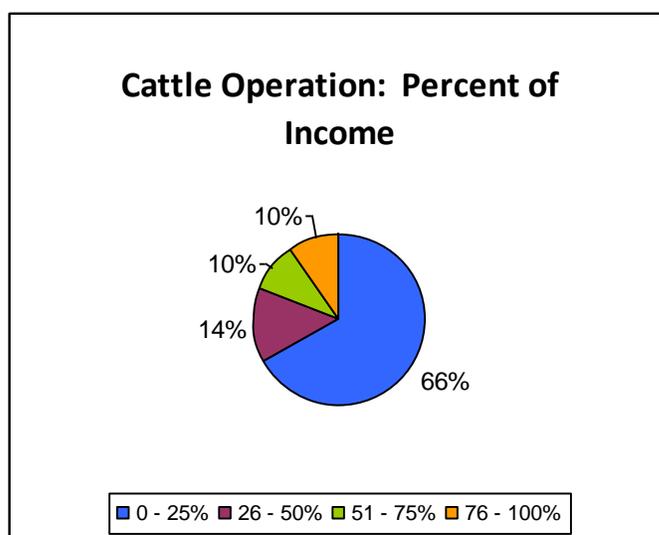


**Cattle Operation Profitability:** In 2007, approximately 54% of the cattle producers in South Florida indicated their cattle operation made a profit, and 26% stated they broke even.

**Business Structure of the Ranch:** Forty-seven percent of those surveyed individually own their cattle operation while 34% are family owned, 20% are cooperation owned, and 13% are owned in partnerships.

**Number of Years in the Cattle Business:** The producers surveyed have been in the cattle business for an average of 34 years.

**Beef Cattle Enterprise Represents Owner's Total Income:** Sixty-six percent of producers surveyed in South Florida stated less than a quarter (25%) of their total income is from their cattle operation.

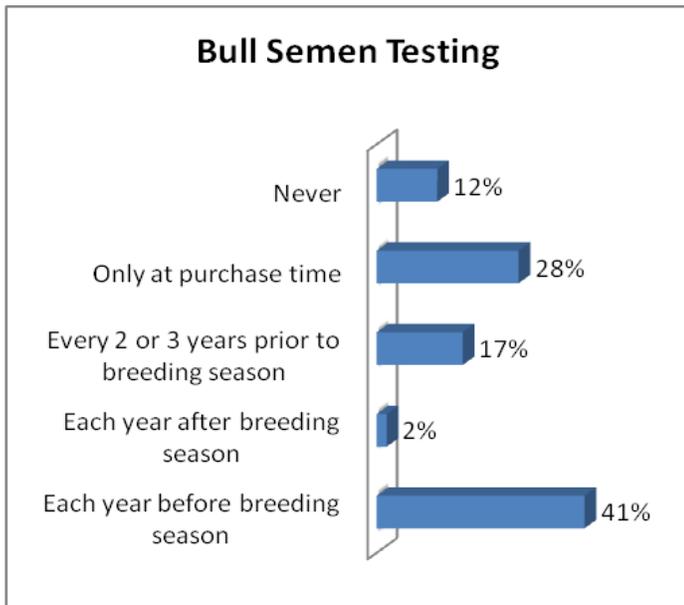


## REPRODUCTION

**Number of Cows and Heifers Exposed:** Of those surveyed, a total of 85,776 cows and 11,396 heifers were exposed to bulls in the 2006-2007 breeding season.

**Replacement Bull Selection:** Surveyors were provided a list of twelve attributes to rank in order of importance when selecting herd replacement bulls. The producers surveyed selected weaning weight as the most important variable followed by yearling weight, with expected progeny differences (EPD's) as their third choice.

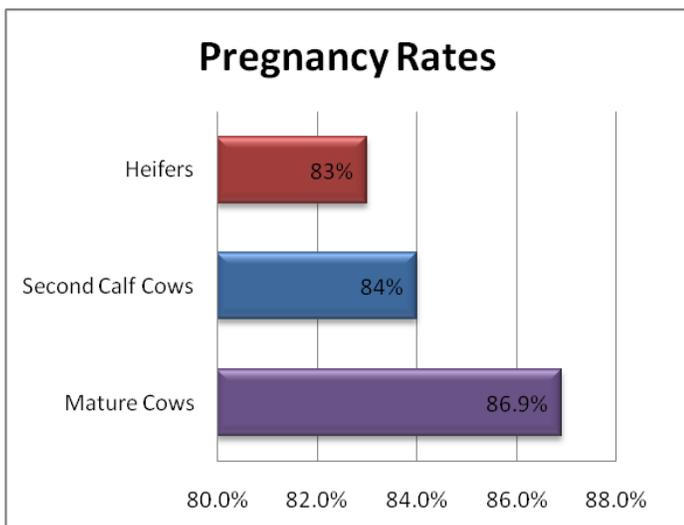
**Testing for Breeding Soundness:** The figure below indicates how often producers semen test their bulls for breeding soundness.



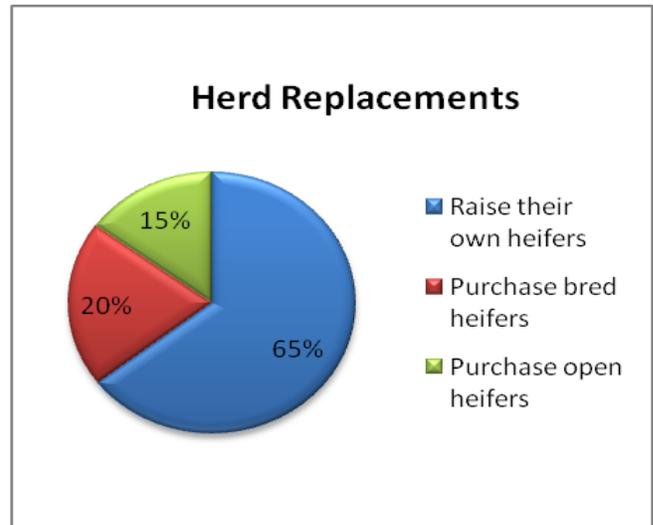
**Trichomoniasis Checking:** Thirty-one percent of the South Florida beef cattle operations surveyed check for Trichomoniasis; 69% do not.

**Pregnancy Checked by Palpation:** Forty-six percent of the South Florida beef cattle producers surveyed palpate all of their cows and 29% palpate only their dry cows. Veterinarians (74%) checked for pregnancy most often, followed by ranch employees (37%).

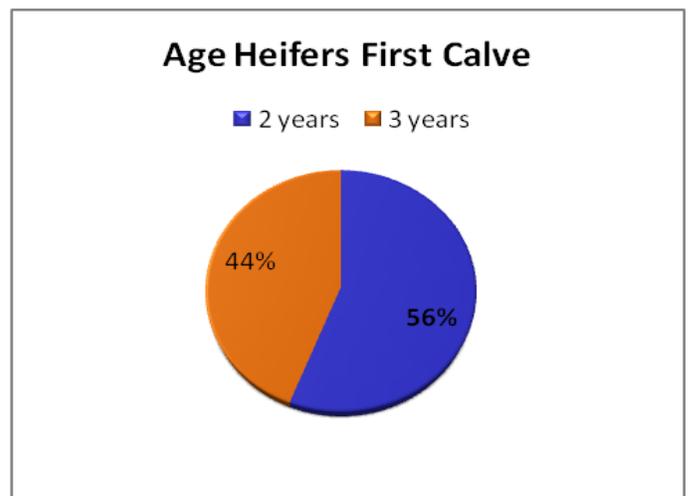
**Average Pregnancy Rates:** The figure below indicates the average pregnancy rates seen by the South Florida cattle producers surveyed.



**Herd Replacements:** The results from the survey show that 82% of the South Florida beef cattle operations surveyed raise their own herd replacements. Twenty-nine percent purchase their herd replacements from private treaty sales and 2% report participation in the FCA Heifer Sale.



**Age Heifers First Calve:** Fifty-six percent of the South Florida beef cattle producers surveyed indicated their heifers calved at two years of age.



**Heifers Exposed to Bulls:** Sixty percent of the South Florida beef cattle operations surveyed do not expose heifers to bulls prior to the mature cow herd.

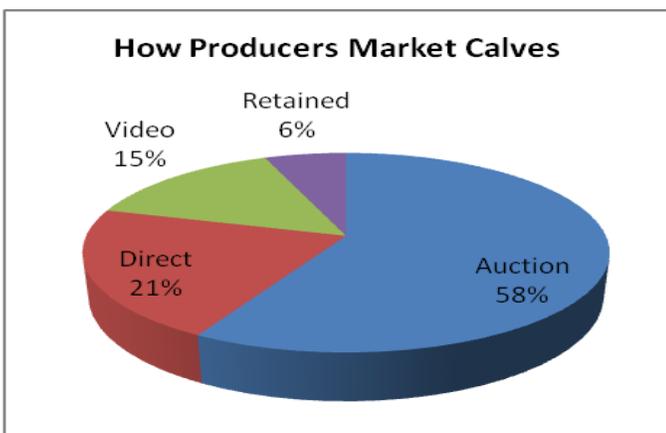
**Culled Cows:** The results from the survey show that South Florida beef cattle producers cull an average of 11% of their cow herd each year.

**Limitations to Reproduction:** Of the five possible limitations (genetics, management, nutrition, parasites, and reproductive diseases), the highest ranked variable was nutrition, followed by genetics and management, respectively.

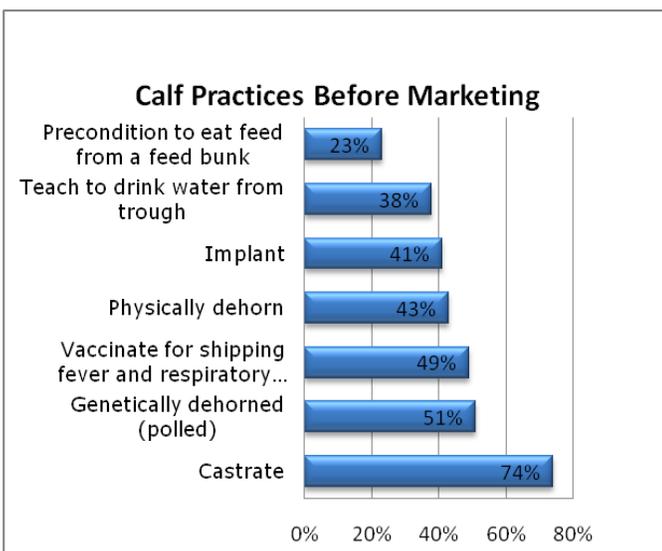
## MARKETING

**Weaning Calves:** The average weight of calves at weaning is 475 pounds and the average age at weaning is 8 months.

**Calf Marketing Methods:** Seventy-nine percent of the producers surveyed sold their calves through the auction market. Many ranchers indicated multiple methods for marketing.



**Marketing Preparation:** Ranchers were asked to report all methods used to ready calves for marketing. Seventy-four percent of the producers castrate calves before marketing.



## PRODUCTION

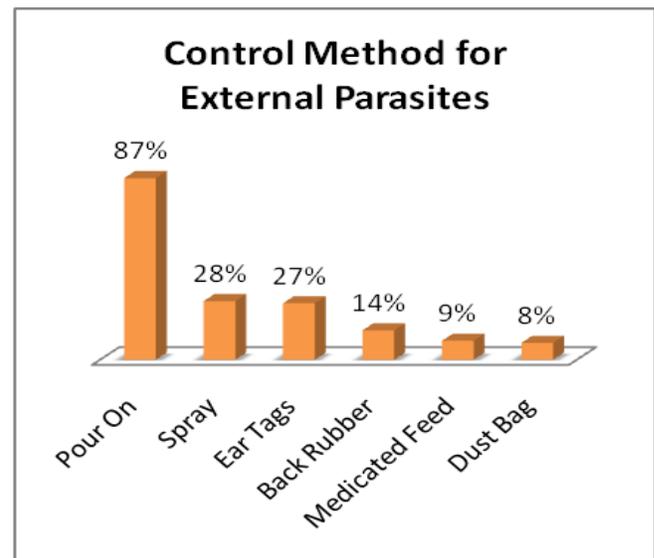
**Cow/Calf Identification:** Sixty percent of the South Florida beef cattle producers surveyed identify each cow, and 38% identify each calf.

**Beef Herd Records:** Seventy-three percent of the producers use written beef herd records. Sixty-three percent keep financial records and 50% utilize production records. Only 47% indicated that they use herd records to select heifers and/or cull cows.

## HERD HEALTH

**Control of External Parasites:** Ninety-eight percent of the producers surveyed control external parasites on their cattle.

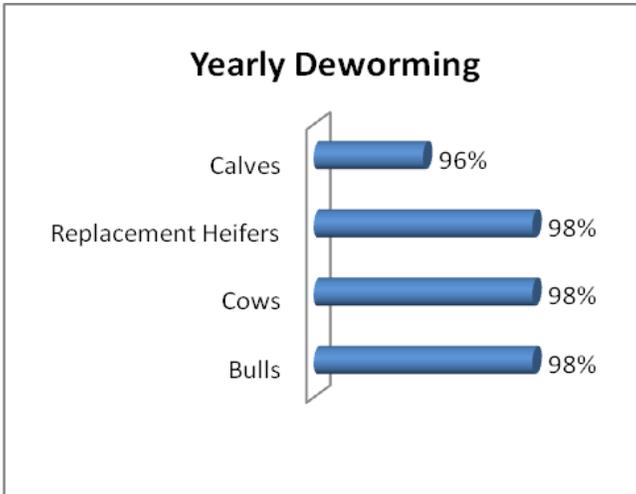
**External Parasite Control Methods:** South Florida cattle producers ranked pour-on products as the most common external parasite control method used with the dust bag method as the least common. Many producers indicated using more than one method.



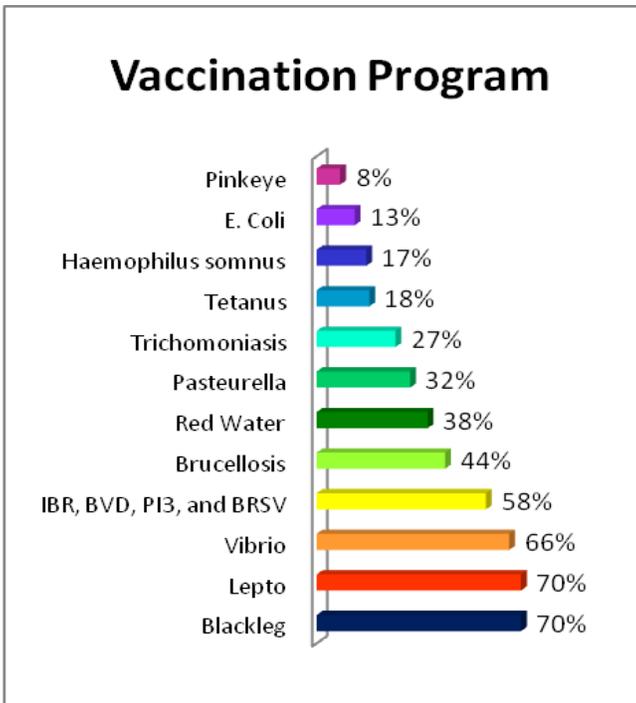
**Liver Fluke Treatment:** Results from the survey indicated that 80% of the producers treat for liver flukes.

## ***NUTRITION***

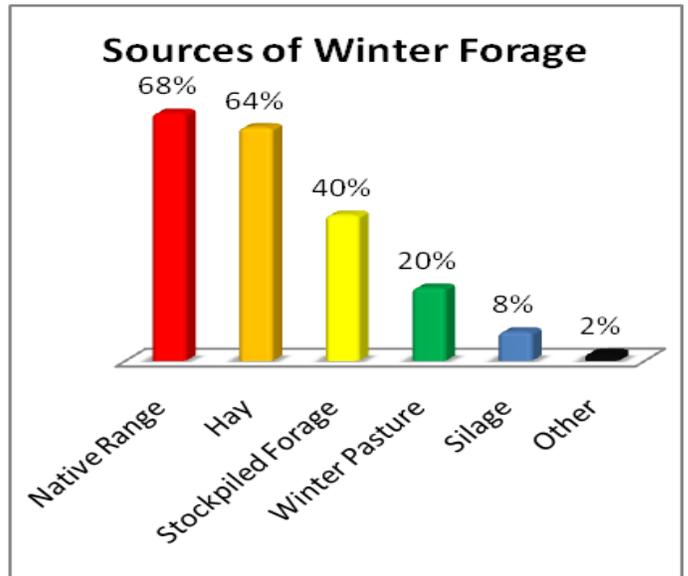
**Deworming the Herd:** Most of the South Florida beef cattle producers surveyed deworm their cattle herd each year.



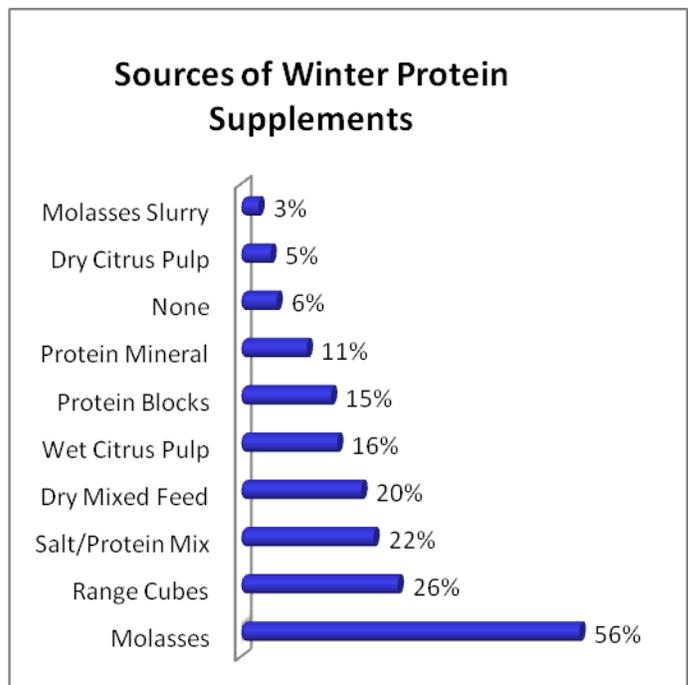
**Vaccination Program:** Many of the producers surveyed vaccinate their cow herd.



**Winter Forages Used:** Native range is used by 68% of the producers in South Florida as a winter forage source, followed by hay (64%). Many producers used several sources of winter forage.



**Winter Protein Supplements:** Often producers used more than one form of winter protein supplement. Sixty-six percent used molasses as a protein supplement during the winter months.



**Analyzing Hay:** Only 18% of the producers surveyed indicated analyzing their hay or silage for forage quality.

**Analyzing Pasture:** Only 19% of the producers surveyed stated they analyze their pasture grass for forage quality.

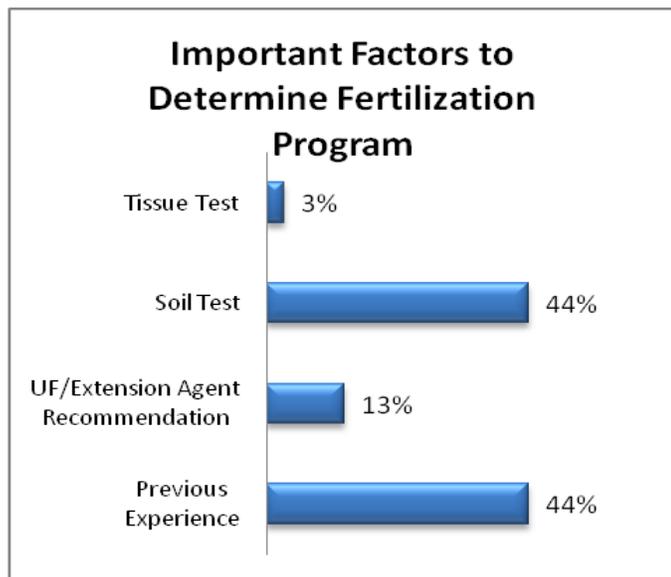
**Treatment of Hay to Increase Quality:** Eighty-three percent of the producers surveyed indicated they were aware hay may be treated to improve its nutritional quality.

**Mineral Supplementation:** Many of the South Florida beef producers surveyed (95%) provide mineral supplementation to their cattle.

## FORAGE PRODUCTION

**Rotational Grazing:** Eighty-three percent of those who responded indicated that they rotationally graze their pasture(s).

**Determining Fertilization Program:** Approximately 44% of the producers used soil testing, as well as previous experience to determine their hay or pasture fertilization program.

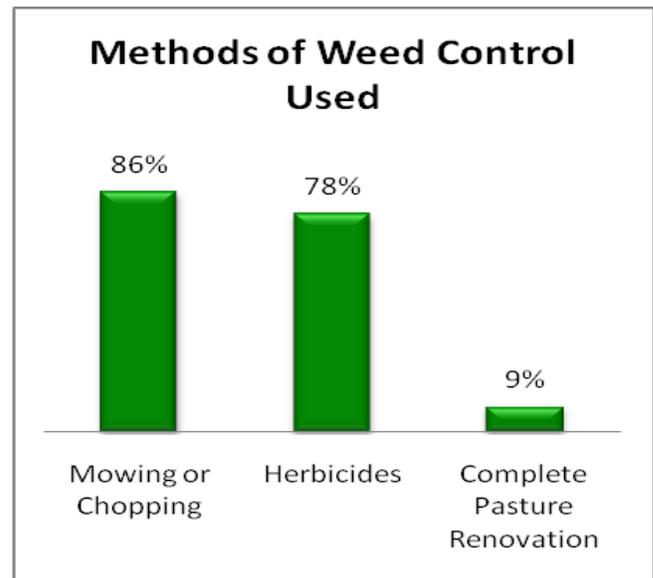


**Organic Waste:** Twelve percent of the producers surveyed used some type of organic waste on their pasture (sludge or biosolids, poultry litter, etc.).

**Pasture Damage:** In the last year, 35% of the producers surveyed indicated mole crickets caused pasture damage.

**Troublesome Weeds:** Cattle Producers from South Florida ranked dog fennel as the most troublesome weed followed by tropical soda apple and smutgrass.

**Weed Control Methods:** Mowing or chopping is used to combat weeds by most producers (86%).



## ENVIRONMENTAL

**Open Water Areas:** Seventy-five percent of the producers surveyed in South Florida have open water areas on their property. The survey indicated that 97% of the producers allow cattle to have access to open water areas.

**Water Troughs:** Approximately 68% of the producers surveyed provide water troughs in their pasture, even with accessible open water areas.

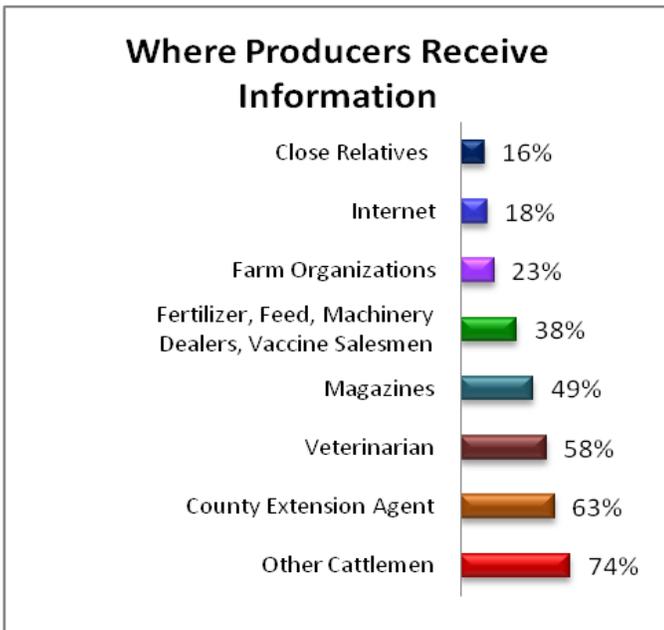
**Feeding Around Open Water Source:** Of the producers surveyed; 22% feed mineral, hay or supplements within 200 feet of open water areas.

**Water Quality Manual:** Fifty-three percent of those surveyed utilized the “Water Quality Best Management Practices for Cow/Calf Operations in Florida.”

## ***OTHER***

**UF Cooperative Extension Service:** Ninety-seven percent of the producers surveyed indicated the service of the UF Cooperative Extension Service to Florida's Beef Industry was satisfactory.

**Information Sources:** Seventy-four percent of the producers surveyed indicated obtaining information on beef production and/or management practices from other cattlemen.



**Problems Facing the Cattle Industry:** Nine (9) issues regarding problems facing the cattle industry were provided to South Florida cattle producers. The results from the survey show urban encroachment as the most important issue affecting the cattle industry followed by animal welfare issues and consumer concerns. Surveyed producers ranked environmental issues as the least important concern.