

Okeechobee Livestock Letter

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November / 2004

UP COMING EVENTS

December 2004		
1 - 3	Florida Cattlemen's Association Quarterly Meeting	Sebring, FL
January 2005		
20	Florida Cattlemen's Institute and Allied Trade Show	Kissimmee, FL
May 2005		
4 - 6	Beef Cattle Short Course	Gainesville, FL

Dear Producers,

Well now that hurricane season is almost officially over for the year, and hopefully everyone is on the road to recovery after our last encounter with Jeanne, maybe we can see some reasonable return to normal. We here in the Extension office hope you, your families, homes and operations survived with minimal damage and are now able to overcome the aftermath and are now able to begin moving forward in your lives again. If there is any way we might be able to assist you, we hope you will let us know and give us the opportunity to help alleviate any burden on you. We do still have numerous tarps of various sizes here in the Extension office if anyone needs them for homes, barns, shade structures or any other buildings you may not be able to get recovered in the near future, and have located several stockpiles of hay in case you may need some for supplementing what could be a suffering pasture and forage year.

Please find in this edition of the Newsletter information on impacts and potential impacts of the storms on the beef industry, the National Animal ID program and potential implications for producers, and updates on other items affecting the industries today.

Again, here's hoping everyone is safe and now on the road to recovery.

Sincerely,

O. Patrick Miller, County Extension Director & Patrick J. Hogue, Extension Agent III - Livestock

Livestock Industry Impacts and Long Term Implication

This years hurricane season left behind some significant damage for the beef and dairy industries. The dairy industry suffered some extreme structural damage, were without power for lengthy periods of time and suffered tremendous losses from injuries to and death of cows and calves, lost production from stress on cattle and having to dump loads of milk. The beef industry also suffered tremendous structural losses to outbuildings, fences, cowpens, but not as much stress to cattle as did the dairy industry. Both industries have also suffered significant losses of production of pastures and forages due to the amount of water and wind damage to forage crops that may have been planted. So much so that many pasture and forage crops are dying from the amount and length of time water has been standing in fields. The loss of production of pastures and forages, length of time water has been standing and associated other problems with standing water such as increased mosquito populations, potential for foot rot and others are problems that producers will be dealing with for a significant time to come.

Nutritional Effects

The basis for production on cattle ranches is the production of pastures and forages for consumption and conversion to meat and milk for marketing. With so much rainfall from summer normal rain and all that the storms brought, pastures were left standing in water for significant amounts of time, reducing the amount of production from those pastures and forages we normally would expect, and leaving us with limited forage for the winter. Not only has production by pastures been reduced, but the quality of the forages is greatly reduced in both nutritional value but also in it's fill value. Wet pasture grasses and other forages do not have the fill value as what we would normally expect from dry forages this time of year, and so the need for supplementation with not only molasses with it's added nutrients may be necessary, but supplementation with a dry supplement such a s hay may also become necessary, especially to maintain the same herd size and stocking rates. Cattle and calves grazing in continuous wet forage and standing water conditions can be expected to lose weight and condition. Calves be be lighter weights when marketed than normal, and loss of condition can ultimately affect a cowherds reproduction rate. It would not be unrealistic for producers to realize an additional cost of \$ 100 per head in feeding costs due to loss of forage production and quality. Add to this the large areas of pastures and forages that are dead or dying from standing water and continuing wet soil conditions, and re-establishment cost will be added to this in the future.

Although the dairy industry utilizes more concentrates in their nutritional programs than the beef industry, forages of higher quality are still the basis for providing nutritional needs to cattle. Forages are ensiled, green chopped or put up as hay to provide the forage base for nutritional programs, and generally some pasture is provided. Forage crops that were to be utilized in one of these manners were virtually lost or rendered unharvestable at a quality that would be of most beneficial to a good nutrition program, and thus additional expenditure will need to be made to secure additional or higher quality forages for the nutrition base. Add to this the additional stress on cattle from the storms, heat from lack of shade, injury and increased pest pressure, and cattle intake has been depressed, thus reducing production and condition.

Reproductive Effects

Reproduction in both beef and dairy herds is the key to economic viability. The higher the number of calves a beef producer has, the greater the numbers they have to choose form for replacements, and the greater number of calves they have to market. For dairy producers, the greater the number of calves they have, the greater the number of cows that are producing milk and the greater the number of heifers they have to choose from for replacements.

With the increased stress level this year due to the storms, increase in pest levels (mosquitos and other insects), potential for lowered nutrition level because of lower forage production and lower quality forage produced, continued environmental pressures (grazing and standing in wet conditions), cattle are and probably will continue to lose condition. With a loss of condition and continued stress from this years environment, chances are cattle are not going to breed back as quickly, maybe not at all, and there is the potential of embryonic death loss and need for rebreeding. We could be looking at lower reproductive rates in cattle when pregnancy checking, and lower calf crop percentages for this coming year. At best, cattlemen will need to leave bulls out longer and have cows breeding later in the breeding season than normal, and dairymen may have to inseminate several times to get cattle settled. All of this means our cost of conception goes up to try and maintain the same calf crop and breeding percentage or suffer the consequences of reduced incomes from less calves to market or fewer cows milking. This may be one of those years when we give cattle a second chance if they have been normally productive animals for us do to the conditions created by nature.

Herd Health Concerns

This is not a year to try to save on herd health costs. Producers need to closely monitor cattle for potential health problems. When exposed to continued wet conditions, the risk of leptospirosis increases, as does potential liver fluke problems, foot rot, respiratory and other health problems. Cattle may need to be re-vaccinated or vaccinated and treated to avoid potential problems. When cattle get sick, the potential for weight and condition loss is only exacerbated and can further effect reproductive performance. Calves that have not been marketed or those that are very young in particular are at risk for potential illness problems and unmarketed calves may lose weight and not be at their optimum market weight and condition when sold. Because of not only wet conditions, but also from the additional stress the storms have put cattle under and heat stress from lack of shade, dairymen may not only see some of these health problems, but may also see somatic cell counts rising that need to be treated.

From the standpoint of timing, this years hurricane season could not have inflicted it's damage on the beef and dairy industry's at a better or worse time. The beef industry is in an excellent pricing, herd building period, and the dairy industry was in a pricing period when they were getting back to profitability again. Now both industries must spend a great deal of potential profits in rebuilding infrastructure, and even if some of it were covered by insurance, it will not all be covered, and the loss of production will never be recovered by insurance or government disaster programs. At some point in the future, the \$ 350,000,000 that was approved for disaster relief for livestock producers will be allocated and available through three programs through Farm Service Agency. In the meantime, keep records of all your recovery expenses, get by the local FSA office and get your claim started. An old saying is that "out of adversity comes progress", and hopefully from our recent environmental adversity each of you will be able to rebuild to the more progressive operation you seek.

National Animal ID - Just Another Government Program, or an Opportunity to Improve?

On Thursday, November 4, USDA held it's first listening session on the National Animal ID Plan and program at the Florida Cattlemen's Association headquarters in Kissimmee. This plan and program, as you will remember, was supposed to have gone into effect with the assignment of Premise ID numbers beginning in July of this year. It is ultimately designed to provide quick traceback of animals in the food chain that test positive to a disease so that it's origin and all locations it has been through can be quickly determined. Such a program would have been extremely beneficial with the positive cow that was found in Washington last December and led to a lengthy and time consuming investigation through the early part of this year. However, with all parties involved not being able to reach agreement on the implementation process, the plan and

program have been delayed for several months. It is now expected that the premise ID system will be in place by the middle of next year. Earlier this year 33 states received USDA grants to implement premise ID plans and programs, and Florida was one of those states. Currently Florida has a premise ID system that is being tested and should be ready for assigning premise ID's to producers in the near future. The premise ID will be a number assigned exclusively to a location to be entered into the USDA system, and will be unique to each location as to where an animal is or has been. It will not be a unique number for each animal entering commerce, they will have their own number assigned to them once the system is in place.

By now almost everyone has heard all the why's and what for's of implementing a National Animal ID program, and you can get most answers you need by going to the US Animal ID Plan website <http://www.usaip.info/>. The question arises, however, is this just another government program that I have to live with and is going to cost me more money in my operation, or is there an opportunity to realize some benefits from it other than the proposed national animal herd health benefits?

The National Animal ID Plan and Program will most definitely utilize electronic RFID or EID tags as one of the options for individual animal identification, which will be the easiest method during the transfer of animals from one premise to another. It is not the only identification method that can be used, but will be the easiest. Hence the system can operate feasibly in the manner designed using computer tracking to identify all premise locations an animal has been to and provide quick traceback to all those locations and with which other animals they have commingled. Normal flap type eartags or other tags that require a paper trail would be too cumbersome and subsequent sorting through such paperwork will not make it a workable system for quick traceback. Electronic eartags that can be read at each premise location as an animal is transferred by simply using a hand held reader or one of the alley or chute readers, to give animals information, automatically transferred through a National computer system, will provide much quicker and easier records of where each animal has been. This technology is already available and being used quite extensively by some feeders, packers, alliance's and management programs. The technology is used to sort cattle by weight, type and into like feeding groups, and to follow cattle through various stages of production from backgrounding to slaughter, and performance type data gathered on individuals and groups for use by owners and operators at each phase. Several tag companies and management programs have had tags and tagging systems available for a number of years and the technology has advanced dramatically, with tag numbering systems that will not run out in most of our lifetimes.

Panel Reader



Electronic ID Tag



Wand Reader



With tags and systems already in place for the National Animal ID program, why then would not a producer want to take full advantage of what an individual animal tagging program has to offer them? The same tag that allows an animal to be tracked and traced back to its original producer can also provide that original producer and any others that owned them the opportunity to get detailed information on performance such as weight gain, feed conversion, health treatments and costs and carcass data all the way through to slaughter. It would provide producers with the opportunity to make more informed selection and culling decisions, make more informed decisions as to whether to retain ownership on cattle and/or participate in value added programs and in general have more detailed performance information on each cow and bull in their herd and how their offspring performed. The opportunity to make more significant progress in shorter time frames with the information that can be obtained to keep up with changing market demands is within everyone's grasp with these technologies. And this information is only available to you or whoever the subsequent owners are, not the government. Is there an additional cost associated with obtaining this information? Through a data service, of course, at a cost of \$.50 to \$ 1.25 per head. However, if you put in the same likeness as the \$ 1.00 per head you may pay for implants and the additional gain you make from this practice and consider the progress you could make with the data you gain from a more complete utilization of electronic ear tags, you could realize the same type of return on investment.

Sooner or later we will all have to deal with the reality of the National Animal ID Plan and program, and rather than just look at it as another government program that costs you money, investigate all the possibilities and determine if there is gain to be made with the full utilization of the electronic tags and information that could be at your disposal.

Out of Adversity

Okeechobee Extension Office

During this years hurricane season and after each storm, we here in the Okeechobee County Extension Office wished we had a better way to disseminate information to producers in a quick and timely manner. Most of our communication with you producers is either done by way of a newsletter, by phone or personal visit and by educational programs. None of these are very feasible when we want and need to get information to you quickly such as a producer meeting day after tomorrow that was scheduled today, or that we got a load of tarps in today for producers to use to cover barns, homes or outbuildings. At times like those, we wished we had a more rapid information dissemination tool, such as an email list or fax list that we could send a batch message out. Since it is the tool we use the most and it is much simpler to compose an e-mail message, we would like to develop an e-mail batch list for all beef and dairy producers who have e-mail addresses for future purposes of getting information to you when it needs to be done quickly. A prime example would be the USDA listening session on the National Animal ID Plan and Program that was recently re-scheduled for Thursday, November 4. Had we had such a batch tool available, we could have sent the information out to everyone on the list so they would be aware of its occurrence. This would be our list here in the Okeechobee County Extension office and would not be released to anyone else, but used only for our purpose of disseminating information to you quickly. If you have an e-mail address, either personally or for your business, and would be willing to be on our batch list, please forward your e-mail address to me at my e-mail address, phogue@ifas.ufl.edu. This is another method that would allow us the opportunity to serve you in a more timely manner, and your help in assimilating such a list would be greatly appreciated.

South Florida Beef-Forage Program

The South Florida Beef-Forage Program is a group of Extension Agents in South Florida covering a 9 County

area and Specialists working together to provide educational programs and activities for producers in the entire area. One of the things we have to assist producers is an award winning website, <http://sfbfp.ifas.ufl.edu/>, on which a lot of information on various subject benefitting producers can be obtained, as well as links to numerous other websites of benefit to you as well. One of our website sections is a Service and Products Directory, on which service providers and product dealers of benefit to beef and dairy producers are listed by County and under a sub-section under which what they provide is listed. Animal breeding service's, Veterinarians, Building Services, Custom haulers, Dayworkers, Fence builders, tractor and equipment services and dealers, hay suppliers and harvesters, seed and planting material suppliers, and many more are listed in this directory for use and contact by agriculture producers. During this years hurricane season, we found that our Service and Products list was badly in need of updating, because some of the contact information was out of date and we know there are many others who could be included on this list are not. We have found over the years, that this, as is the case with many directories like this is a tremendous way to advertise and increasing business for providers, at no cost, and gives a one stop shopping place for producers to go to to find the products or services they are seeking. We are seeking to update this Service and Products list so we can insure all those in the area who can be included, are included and are asking that if you offer a product or service that is needed an useful to livestock producers and would like for us to include you on our list, or know someone who should be, please either the information to me at my e-mail address, phogue@ifas.ufl.edu, or call or bring it by the County Extension office. To be sure we get you included on as many of the sub-lists as you may qualify to be on, we need a company name, contact person, physical address, phone numbers where the business or contact person can be reached, e-mail address if available, and a list of all the services that you may provide as part of your business, and include any restrictions or coverage areas that you may have. Your assistance in updating this directory will be greatly appreciated.

Florida Cattlemen's Institute and Allied Trade Show

The 22nd Annual Florida Cattlemen's Institute and Allied Trade Show for this coming year is scheduled for January 20, 2005 at Osceola Heritage Park in Kissimmee. The theme for this years Cattlemen's Institute is "Preparing for the Lean Years", and will feature several informative presentations by some excellent speakers. This years featured speaker will again be Mr. Randy Blach, Executive Director of Cattle-Fax. Mr Blach will have two presentations, one in morning discussing where we are in our market situation and cattle cycle, and the second in the afternoon on Marketing Strategies for the lean years to come including how the hurricanes may have effected our markets, how BSE may impact us, and how we may be impacted by the National Animal ID plan and program. Dr. John Arthington and Dr. Findlay Pate will discuss Forage and Nutrition Management during tough times and Commissioner Charles Bronson will be on hand during the morning session to give us an update from FDACS including Floridas Premise ID program in conjunction with the National Animal ID plan. In the afternoon, Dr. Todd Thrift and Dr. Max Irsik will discuss and demonstrate some of the technology, particularly electronic tags and readers, that will be available for use for the National Animal ID plan and program. Please find included with this mailing a copy of the program agenda for this years Florida Cattlemen's Institute, and we ask as we do each year that if you plan to attend, please call us at the County Extension office so we can estimate a more accurate count for lunch.

Tropical Soda Apple - New Tools on the Horizon

We have been helped in keeping Tropical Soda Apple (TSA) in check this year by the amount of rainfall we have received by our near normal rainfall, and what we received from the hurricanes. Excessive and standing water limits TSA growth and production, and so we have had one blessing as a result of the storms. We were seeing a pretty wide spread explosion of TSA early in the year, but wet conditions have helped curtail this for now, however we can expect it to make a strong comeback as we dry up. The good news is, that as research has progressed we have some new tools that either are or are going to be available to us in our efforts to

control TSA and move closer to potential eradication of this noxious weed. Additionally, the good news is that it looks like all three of the new tools will be excellent controls for TSA on dairies, and at least two of them right now in natural areas, hammocks and other dense vegetative areas. Two of the control measures are biological, and the third is a new chemical.

The biological controls for TSA do not have widespread availability yet, but the TSA leaf beetle as it is being called, *Gratiana boliviana*, has been released now in 11 Counties in Florida, including here in Okeechobee County. The damage this beetle does is defoliation of the plant very much like what most of you have seen Colorado Potato beetle do to TSA. This beetle is a small green tortoise beetle that consumes foliar tissue of the plant in all stages of it's life cycle and unlike the Colorado Potato beetle, which does most of it's damage as an adult. The Colorado Potato beetle move on to the next host plant when it defoliates a TSA plant, and thus gives TSA an opportunity to recover from the damage. The TSA leaf beetle not only does damage as an adult, but lays eggs on the plant and consumes plant tissue in the larva and pupa stages also, and moves very slowly compared to Colorado Potato beetle, so it continues to damage TSA plants to the point of killing them. Although it spread very slowly, it is believed it will ultimately spread to provide wide control of TSA plants, and in years of research testing, is host specific for TSA, so damage to other related nightshade plants is not expected. This is one of the controls that ultimately may prove one of the most useful tools in controlling TSA in native and wooded areas that have long been a seed source to spread to other areas. Dairies that can not utilize the current chemical controls because of withdrawal periods for milk could benefit from this beetle also. Several beetle rearing sights have now been established throughout the state that should eventually provide widespread availability of the beetle.

The other biological control that is in the testing and rearing stage is the Tobacco mild green mosaic tabamovirus (TMGMV). TMGMV is a natural occurring virus in Florida that has been around for generations that typically causes mosaic discolorations in tobacco and some of the pepper plants, but the U2 strain of this virus causes a hypersensitive response in TSA that causes foliar lesions, systemic necrosis of leaves and petioles and ultimately systemic wilting and death of the TSA plants in about 21 days. In research plots around the state, TMGMV has shown a 99 % control rate and could be another excellent tool for TSA control in native and wooded areas and on dairies. TMGMV is currently in the EPA approval process as a bioherbicide. One of the problems with the use of TMGMV is that it is a soil born virus, and does not spread from plant to plant easily, and does not infect all plants simply with a typical spray application. It generally must be applied either by high pressure spraying or sprayed on to plants that have had some type of mechanical damage done to it. Research tests have inflicted damage by mowing, dragging with chain link fence, tires and rugs, and high pressure spraying has provided the best results. The virus does not enter the plant easily with the use of high pressure spraying or mechanical damage. Because it does not spread easily, it is considered an extremely low risk to any of the potential crops such as tobacco or bell and hot peppers unless sprayed in close proximity to them. It has been tested with the TSA leaf beetle, both on the beetle and on the leaves being consumed by them in hopes they would spread the virus, but these tests have shown the beetle to not be useful in the spread of the virus. Once the virus is established in an area, it is long lived and can easily be reproduced for spraying other TSA plants by smashing or grinding infected leaves and putting them in water to transmit the infection. Once it is approved as a bioherbicide, reproduction facilities are already in the works to make it readily available.

The third product that will be available in the near future is a new chemical by Dow Agri-Sciences that currently only has a number. It has been tested widely in Florida for the last two years and has shown 95-100 % control of TSA in large plot work at various rates of 7 ounces per acre at the highest. Not only does it decimate TSA, but has broad spectrum control of numerous other weed species also and doesn't do any damage to bahiagrass. This product will be released as a named product early in 2005 with possibly a temporary label in Florida and should be fairly widely available for use in Florida by 2006. Not only does this product decimate existing plants, but has residual soil activity for it appears up to six months, and so kills germinating seedlings of TSA and should prove extremely useful in eliminating the seedlings of the

tremendous soil seed bank of TSA that is one of our biggest problems. In discussions with researchers, this product has been tested at ten times the normal application rate, disseminates quickly and does not show up in milk, and they believe it is going to be labeled with no grazing restrictions on dairies. Grazing restrictions on dairies has been one of the biggest problems in using chemicals to control TSA and why they have not been able to adequately control it in the past. Besides it's obvious benefits of control of TSA, soil residual action and lack of grazing restrictions, this product is and will be considerably cheaper on a per acre basis than the other products we have had available to us over the course of time we have been fighting the TSA battle.

Renovating Your Forages Program

This year has been a trying year thus far for the production of pastures and forages. The amount of rainfall received in the entire South Central Florida area left thousands of acres of pastures under water or in wet soil conditions for significantly long periods of time, and production was at best tremendously reduced and in a lot of cases, pastures will need to be re-established. In response to this need, The South Florida Beef-Forage Program Agents are holding a series of "Renovating Your Forages Programs." This program will be held in five different locations in a two week period to assist producers in preparation for the potential need to re-establish pastures and forages. Topics to be discussed during each location session will be:

Land Preparation

Grass Varieties

Fertilization and pH

Weed Control and Herbicides

Grazing Management of Newly Established Fields

Economics of Establishment (including government available assistance programs)

Dates and locations of the sessions will be:

February 28, 2005 - Bartow, FL

March 1, 2005 - Wauchula, FL

March 3, 2005 - Arcadia, FL

March 8, 2005 - Okeechobee, FL

March 10, 2005 - LaBelle, FL

Each program will begin at 6:00 PM and conclude at approximately 8:30 or 9:00 PM and plans are that a meal will be included. Additional information and program brochures will be available in the near future and mailed out at that time.

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact



[Pat Hogue](#) or [Pat Miller](#)



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