



Polk Rancher

Beef and Forage Newsletter

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Winter 2000 / Volume 4 Number 4

Polk County Beef Industry's Challenges for 2000 and Beyond

I see a number of challenges facing beef cattle producers over the next ten years and beyond. The number one problem is going to be dealing with urbanization and the regulation that comes with higher and higher demands on natural resources. The second challenge I foresee is the fight for profitability with the need for improved efficiency to stay afloat in an urbanizing area. Another problem Polk Cattlemen will face is producing more on fewer acres as land values rise and families struggle to keep the family in the cattle business.

Urbanization

Sheriff Crow made the statement at their annual Ag Appreciation Luncheon that 70,000 moved to Polk County last year with 80% of this growth occurring outside of the incorporated communities. That means more agricultural land out of production, more demand for county services and also a rise in property values. In a recent agriculture economic impact study of Polk County, it was determined that for every tax dollar agricultural operations paid they received 8 cents worth of services from the county in return. But, for every \$1 homeowners paid in taxes they received \$1.89 worth of services. That means agriculture provides the funding for our growing urban population, not to mention the water and other resources needed. Currently 42% of Polk County's land area is being utilized for agriculture, but that percentage is shrinking. This will make involvement in your county Cattlemen's Association and Farm Bureau even more important. No longer can producers sit back in politics. Ranchers need to take an active role as an organized group.

Efficiency

Finally, cattle prices have started to rise. I anticipate at least three years of improved prices, but we will see lower calf prices in 2004-06 if the ten year cycle continues. Cattlemen in Florida will continue to face discounts for freight and Brahman breeding. In order to remain in business ranchers are going to have to look at ways of becoming more efficient and improving the calves produced. The days of year round breeding, no records and low management are coming to a close.

There are several ways to improve efficiency. One of the simplest and most effective is annual pregnancy testing and using a 90-120 day controlled breeding season. This does not require extensive record keeping since cattle are sorted through the chute following weaning. If cows are open they can either be sold or branded and sorted to a low maintenance pasture. The shorter breeding season means that all of the herd is in the same stage of production. All of the herd can be fed correctly at the right time. This way you don't have dry cows getting fat wasting feed or wet cows getting thin from a feed shortage. Also labor is reduced because all of the calves are weaned and worked at the same time.

At some point, however, to truly become efficient, production and financial records must be developed. This does not mean that you have to number every cow and calf, but at least keep track of cattle sales, inventory at breeding, pregnancy rates, average weaning weights, body condition at weaning, timing and amount of feeding, fertilizer and pasture expenses, labor costs and equipment and facility purchases and repairs. All this information can be used over time for total ranch management and developing ranch goals and objectives for the future. If you don't know where you are it's hard to know what to improve.

Pasture Improvement

Even with improved cattle efficiency, cattlemen will have to get more out of their pastures. Mole crickets, soda apple, smutgrass, cogongrass are steadily getting worse in this area and if this trend continues pasture yields will decline even more. Currently we do not have a very good control for mole crickets. The one strategy that has been successful is planting stargrass. This is the one grass variety that is bothered very little by mole crickets. Bermuda grasses are not as hampered by them as bahia but can still be damaged. Soda apple and smutgrass can be controlled chemically with the proper management plan. They are not, however, weeds that are easy to eliminate. The worst weed to eliminate is cogongrass. Spraying with roundup in the fall, along with discing, burning and mowing through the growing season will slowly reduce the amount of cogongrass, but with the plant's tremendous rhizome system there is no quick fix. Plus, this grass is a tremendous seed producer making it very difficult to eliminate if your neighbors are not controlling it as well.

The best solution I see for getting more out of your pastures is to diversify varieties of grasses to have a longer grazing window. Limpograss (hemarthria) and Rhodesgrass have 30-35% of there growth from October through February. Rhodesgrass also has a much higher feeding value than bahia in the fall of the year. Limpograss can be stockpiled in late summer because of its high digestibility and then grazed off and on through most of the winter and early spring. Stargrass has a much higher yield than bahia and grows a little longer in the fall. This grass can also be used for hay production and has higher protein levels than bahia when harvested before maturity. Bermudagrasses are better adapted for the dryer soils and provide higher yields and quality of hay than bahia. Certainly we will probably always have a major portion of our pastures in Bahia, but other grasses can extend the time when fresh grass is available, provide higher quality hay and possibly allow for higher stocking rates. The other thing that can extend the yield and quality of fall pastures is aeschynomene, a fall legume which is high in protein and adds nitrogen to the soil in bahia pastures. The final keys to improving what we get from pastures is fertilization and grazing management. No matter what species of grass you choose, timely, adequate fertilization and rotational grazing improves the yield by as much as 20-30%.

Cattlemen's Institute Focuse on Beef Industry in the 21st Century

Mark your new calendars. You will not want to miss this program at this years Florida Cattlemen's Institute and Allied Trade Show to be held on Thursday, January 20 at the Kissimmee Valley Ag Center on Highway 192 East of Kissimmee.

If you have not been to one of the 16 previous Institutes, this is a combination beef cattle trade show and educational program. Over 700 cattlemen annually attend what has truly become the top beef cattle, single day event in the Southeast. The trade show exhibitors provide the funding to feed everyone free of charge and pay for the travel expenses for some of the most knowledgeable speakers nationwide. Whether you are a ranch owner, manager or worker, this is one of the best opportunities you have to find out what is happening and changing in the modern beef industry. We do ask that you RSVP to Doug Mayo at 533-0765 if you plan to attend so we can estimate the number of meals to purchase.

The main speakers on the program will give insight on what is to be expected for the next millennium in the areas of animal breeding, cattle marketing and in the meat industry. Dr. Bill Beal, one of the most dynamic and respected speakers on animal breeding from Virginia Tech, will discuss new technology and developments on the horizon in the area of animal breeding. So many changes are coming down the road in a few years in this area as more and more is discovered in the area of gene selection, sexing semen, cloning and biotechnology. While many of these new innovations will only affect the purebred industry in the beginning, many will have long lasting implications for the commercial industry as well.

Randy Block, a beef cattle marketing guru from Cattle Fax, Englewood, Colorado, will be sharing his insight on changes in the beef industry structure and the economic outlook of the beef industry in the 21st century. The beef industry structure is in the midst of major changes from traditional cash markets of the past, and Block will share with us his feelings on what is to be expected in the years ahead.

Part of the transformation to come in the next century may very well be a total change in the grading and processing of cattle. Dr. Fred Leak, University of Florida, will be speaking on these changes as well as what implications food safety will have on meat packers and how that will affect producers.

These are the main topics for discussion at the Institute, but there will also be some others of interest to cattlemen. There will be someone present from the Division of Forestry to discuss changes in the regulations and the recent legislation on prescribed burning. There will be a presentation on use of the Internet to manage a cattle operation. We will also receive updates on how the Beef Checkoff is working and FCA's BMP (best management practices) program for maintaining water quality.

Of course there will be a wide assortment of allied industry representatives on hand at the trade show which provide products and services in animal health, feeds, breeding cattle, livestock and farming equipment, fencing etc. Some ranches have become dependant on this trade show to do their purchasing for the year, because all of these companies will be represented at one time in one location.

Smutgrass Field Day Jan 14

The Southwest Florida Research and Education Center will be hosting a Smutgrass Field Day on January 14 from 8:00 AM - 1:00 PM near Immokalee. The topics of the day will include a review of current research and the new IFAS fact sheet on smutgrass control. Dr. Jeff Mullahey will discuss some management strategies they have developed in conjunction with area ranches. There will also be a tour

of research plots demonstrated different approaches to dealing with this troublesome weed. Lunch is being sponsored by DuPont Agricultural Products. They need to know if plan to attend so that adequate food is available. For more information or to RSVP contact Susan Steed 941-658-3403 by January 7.

Want to Learn How to Surf the Web or Use Email?

Jim Selph, the DeSoto County Livestock Extension Agent is offering two classes on using the Internet for agricultural information and using the newest form of communication electronic mail (Email). Cattle ranchers have an enormous amount of valuable information available to them on the Internet once they learn how to access it. Market prices, IFAS publications, sire summaries for most breeds, weather forecasts and radar, information on upcoming programs and product information are all available if you know where to look. Email is a very convenient form of communication many busy people are now using. Most ranchers can not usually get to a phone when people are available, but with email you can contact people when it is convenient for you and no more phone tag. This is an excellent opportunity to join with other producers in a course dealing with this new technology on a basic level.

The Agriculture and the Internet Course will be held on Tuesday, January 18 at 7:00 PM at the Family Service Center in Arcadia. The Using Email Course will be held on January 25 at 7:00 PM at the same location in Arcadia. To enroll in these courses or to get more information contact Jim Selph at 941-993-4846. There is no fee for these courses.

Hands-On Agriculture Equipment Demonstration



Grove Equipment Service in Alturas will be hosting a hands-on tractor and equipment demonstration Friday and Saturday,

February 24th and 25th from 9 AM to sundown at Keen Ranch. They envision this event as an annual "Mini Moultrie". Keen ranch is located on Highway 60 east of Lake Wales.

The main focus of the two day event is to allow producers the opportunity to see the latest equipment for grove spraying and hay production in action. You will even have the opportunity to run this equipment for yourself if you so desire. There will be Heston and Vermeer hay equipment, Durand-Wayland and John Bean grove spraying equipment along with tractors, loaders, post hole augers, mowers, hedgers, discs, rototillers and various other types of machinery for farm and home use. Company and sales representatives will be on hand to provide the needed information on all types of equipment.

If you would like to participate, or want more information please RSVP to Jason Keen at 537-1345 by February 18. Lunch will be available both days.

USDA \$\$ Program Sign Up Dates Approaching

The USDA has three programs which may be of interest to ranchers. The Forestry Incentive Program

(FIP) provides funding to assist producers in establishing a pine tree operation. The sign up dates for this program are from January 15-February 4. The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) offers assistance to producers with the cost of enhancing the wildlife population on an operation. This might mean planting legumes, developing wildlife corridors or purchasing nesting boxes. The Registration period runs from January 18-February 11. The other program which applies best to ranchers and grove owners is the Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP). USDA will provide up to 75% of the costs for improvements that will make more efficient use of natural resources. This would include more efficient irrigation systems, cross fencing, establishing legumes and more productive forages, fencing off streams and lakes, and other improvements which could both improve profitability and make better use of natural resources. The sign up period for this program is February 14-March 10. To sign up for any of these programs or to get more information, contact Ed Sheehan at the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) office in Bartow. They are located next door to the Ag Center on Highway 17 or can be reached at 863-533-7121.

Mayo Says Farewell

Well, after almost four years of service here in Polk County, my family and I are moving to Jackson County. I am going to be their livestock extension agent and live in Marianna. This is a good opportunity for us, but I will truly miss all of the people I have come to know and work with in Polk County. My last day of work here will be January 28.

I have gained a great deal from working with the South Florida Beef-Forage Program, the Florida Cattlemen's Institute, along with the Extension Service, Cattlemen's Association, Farm Bureau, FFA and 4-H programs here in Polk County. You have a lot to be proud of because of the number of hard working, dedicated people in agriculture here. Due to the relationship you have with your state and national legislators, Polk County agriculture has an outstanding voice in Tallahassee and Washington. You have a tremendous youth livestock program here with a youth fair second to none in the state. There is no doubt that this is due to the number of dedicated volunteers and companies who know the value of helping youth better themselves.

I wish all of you the best and ask that you be as supportive of my successor as you have been for me. It will take time to hire a new agent. I would not expect to have someone on the job until the end April or May. In the mean time, if you have questions or need assistance, contact Bill Hill, the Polk County Extension Director, at 533-0765. He is knowledgeable about livestock and will do all he can to help.



Are You Kidding Me?

Things that Make You Go Hmmm

What do chickens think people taste like?

What hair color do they put on the drivers' license of a bald man?

Why didn't Noah swat those two mosquitoes?

If you take an Oriental person and spin him around a few times will he become disoriented?

When dog food is new and improved tasting, who tests it?

Why do they sterilize the needle for a lethal injection?

Why doesn't glue stick to the inside of the bottle?

Why don't they call mustaches "mouth brows"?

Why is it called tourist season if we can't shoot at them?

1st Grade Proverbs

A first grade teacher gave her students the first half of famous proverbs and asked them to complete them:

Better to be safe than to...punch a 5th grader.

Strike while the...bug is close.

It's always darkest before...daylight savings time.

Don't bite the hand that...looks dirty.

A miss is as good as a...mister.

You can't teach an old dog...math.

If you lie down with dogs...you will stink in the morning.

Happy is the bride who...gets all the presents.

A penny saved is...not much.

Two is company, three's...the musketeers.

If at first you don't succeed...get new batteries.

You get out of something...what you see in the box.

When the blind lead the blind...get out of the way.

Laugh and the whole world laughs with you. Cry and....you have to blow your nose.

Wanna Be Cowboy

A city slicker went to a ranch and told them he wanted to learn to be a cowboy. The foreman said he would let him watch. He showed the city slicker a rope and said, "We use these to catch cows." The city slicker wanted to seem as though he knew that, so he said, "I see. And where do you put the bait?"

The Hat

Why are cowboy hats turned up on the sides?

So three cowboys can fit in a pickup truck.

Little Angel?

A little girl became restless in church after the preacher's sermon on tithing dragged on and on. Finally, the little girl leaned over to her mother and said, "Mommy, if we give him the money now will he let us go?"

Hot Sauce

A preacher who loved extra hot, hot sauce always kept a bottle on his dinning room table. He offered some to one of his church members who tried a whole spoonful. When the man was finally able to speak he gasped, "I've heard many pastors preach hellfire sermons, but you are the first one I've met who passed out samples!"

Bad Boy

A teacher was going over a history lesson and asked little Johnny, "Who signed the Declaration of Independence?" Johnny answered, "I don't know and I don't care." After he got sent home his father asked, "Boy why did you get in trouble? Don't you know how important school is?"

The next day the father takes Johnny back to class and sends him in to the class to apologize to the teacher. He goes inside and again the teacher asked little Johnny, "Who signed the Declaration of Independence?" Johnny answered again, "I don't know and I don't care!" She sent him out of the room. Johnny's father took him by the arm and said, "I thought I taught you that if you get yourself in trouble you got to get yourself out of it. Now if you signed that paper, go in the and tell her the truth."

Farewell and God Bless You,

Doug Mayo

Livestock Extension Agent I

Calendar Of Events

January

8	Market Steer Clinic and Jackpot Show, Bartow
14	Smutgrass Field Day, Immokalee
18	Ag and the Internet Course, Arcadia
13-23	Citrus Festival, Winter Haven
20	Florida Cattlemen's Institute, Kissimmee
25	Using Email Course, Arcadia

February

3-14	Florida State Fair, Tampa
24-25	Ag Equipment Demonstration, Lake Wales

March

2-12	Central Florida Fair, Orlando
2-12	Strawberry Festival, Plant City
4-10	Polk County Youth Fair, Bartow
10	USDA EQIP Sign-up Deadline, Bartow

April

15	Cattle Marketing Program, Sebring
25-27	Reproductive Mgmt. School, Wauchula

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact



[Doug Mayo](#)



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