

# POLK COUNTY LIVESTOCK REPORT

Polk County Extension • University of Florida • IFAS • 1702 Highway 17 South • Bartow, FL

<http://polk.ifas.ufl.edu>

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*If you would prefer to receive this newsletter by email or through both email and the U.S. mail, please email me at [bccarlis@ufl.edu](mailto:bccarlis@ufl.edu) to let me know.*

*If you know fellow producers that are not receiving this newsletter, please share my contact information with them so that they may be added to the list.*

*If you have information that needs to be included in the newsletter, please let me know.*

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Hopefully these summer months will bring the much needed summer rains to relieve our droughty pastures. It is unlikely that we will see any relief in the near future from rising input costs, but there are some steps producers can take to possibly reduce their impact on profitability.

The faltering economy has directly impacted cattle producers with increased production costs and stagnant calf prices. At this time, cattlemen aren't just looking for ways to maximize their profits; many are looking for ways to simply breakeven or at least minimize loss. In every aspect of the operation, producers are being faced with increased costs; fertilizer, feed, mineral supplementation, and fuel to name a few. Cattlemen are challenged to find ways to cut corners in cost without cutting production.

I would like to encourage livestock producers to take advantage of the various industry associations, such as the Cattlemen's Association and Farm Bureau. There is value in membership that extends far beyond a magazine or a newsletter. Membership benefits include activities and programs that promote your product, networking with other producers, a voice with your political leaders, and much more.

As always, I look forward to serving your livestock and forage production needs. Please feel free to call me at (863) 519-8677 Ext. 104 or email me at [bccarlis@ufl.edu](mailto:bccarlis@ufl.edu).

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## Maximizing the Fertilization Dollar

Cattle producers are going to have to implement fertilization strategies that will bring the most return on the dollar. The increasing cost of fertilizer has many cattlemen questioning whether it is even an option for this growing season. Choosing not to fertilize may be more costly in the end than a carefully planned fertilization strategy. A few management strategies and considerations could significantly decrease fertilization requirements and maximize forage utilization.

AgriLife Research forage management scientist, Gerald Evers, suggests management

practices that include lengthening the grazing season five to six weeks by over-seeding with a cool season annual in the fall or grazing stockpiled pastures. He says producers can also make use of recycled nutrients in the pasture. According to Evers, “over 90% of the nitrogen, phosphorus, and potash that’s in the forage a cow eats is actually excreted back in the soil.” Producers should also consider rotational grazing to maximize forage production and utilization.

Producers should also determine their fertilization requirements based on soil-test informa-

tion. Proper pH, adequate phosphorus, potassium and nitrogen levels must be considered and matched to the forage species and grazing requirements. Producers should not apply nitrogen fertilizer if their pasture grasses do not have the capacity to respond. Proper assessment of the soil nutrients available will help ranchers make economic fertilization decisions.

Now, more than ever, it is important that producers carefully consider their forage production and fertilization program to make best use of their dollars.

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## Summer Mineral Supplementation

As with everything else, the cost of mineral supplements is on the rise. Key ingredients such as phosphorous are rapidly escalating in price. Now is a good time for producers to look at their mineral supplementation program and ensure that it is meeting their cow-herd needs based on the macro and trace minerals available in their forages. A majority of a cow’s nutrient requirements are in protein and energy. However, attention must be paid to the nutrients that are needed in lesser quantities—macro and trace minerals.

Minerals have an important role in fetal development, colostrum quality, newborn calf vigor, immune function in cattle of all ages and rebreeding of the cow<sup>1</sup>. Cutting corners on mineral supplementation may result in greater costs due to loss of productivity in the cow herd. Pro-

ducers are encouraged to determine their supplementation program based on the production cycle of the cows and the nutrient requirements associated with those cycles. Through forage testing, ranchers can determine the mineral availability in their summer pastures. Forage nutrient availability in summer months differs from that in winter months. Once deficiencies are identified, producers can look at the mineral choices available. Choosing a mineral based on the deficient minerals, will help the rancher determine which mineral supplement will work efficiently and effectively on his operation. Therefore, precious dollars are not spent on mineral supplements that are not necessary.

During winter months, minerals can be added to protein

and/or energy supplements to ensure adequate consumption. However, during the summer months when forages are typically meeting the protein and energy requirements of the herd, a free choice mineral must be offered.

Complete minerals can be purchased in the form of a block, but consumption is often inadequate.<sup>2</sup> Use of salt blocks (white or yellow) will not adequately meet the herd’s needs. However, use of a quality, palatable, free-choice mineral is often an efficient, cost-effective means of meeting the cow’s nutritional requirements.

Selecting a quality mineral product that matches your herd’s nutritional requirements and your pasture nutrient availability will save dollars in the long run.

<sup>1</sup>Herd, Dennis B. “Fine Tuning Mineral Management for Beef Cattle.” *The Cattleman*. Aug. 06.

<sup>2</sup>Rossi, Johnny. *Mineral Supplements for Beef Cattle*. UGA Ext. Bull 895. Dec. 06.

## Cattle-Fax Cow/Calf Survey Results

Cattle-Fax surveyed more than 560 cattle producers of all sizes and types from 38 states and has published some of the preliminary results. According to Cattle-Fax, “cow/calf producer profitability remained strong in 2007. Rising input costs will remain a major factor this year and are expected to erode profitability.” Further results will be available in *The Cow/Calf and Stocker Survey Results* publication this May.

Cattle-Fax Staff. “Survey Results In,” *Trends*. Vol. 2, Iss. 4.

Cattle-Fax Cow/Calf and Stocker Survey Preliminary Results	
Number of Respondents	563
Avg. Calving Period (Days)	94
Avg. Weaning Age (Days)	218
Avg. Weaning Weight	552
Avg. Price Paid for Bulls (\$/Head)	\$2,653
Avg. Annual Cash Cow Costs (\$/Head)	\$391
Weaned calf profit of \$25-\$150/Head (%)	88%

## Body Condition Scores and Productivity

Reproductive performance relates directly to income and profit in beef cattle production. And body condition relates directly to reproductive performance. Therefore, body condition is directly related to income and profit. Producers can use body condition scores (BCS) to make management decisions.

Body condition of beef cows is scored from 1 (thin) to 9 (fat). The optimal body condition score is 5 or higher at calving and through breeding. Cows with a lower BCS bring in significantly lower income from calves produced. Body condition is related to pregnancy rate, calving interval, calf age at weaning, and calf daily gain. Body condition is affected by such factors as stocking rate, forage species, forage management, date of calving, weaning age, supplements, genetics, parasites, diseases, and weather to name a

few. Managing the herd to improve BCS using supplementation strategies or other management techniques that provide a high return per dollar invested is a key factor in a profitable operation.

BCS can provide useful information about the overall nutritional status of individual cows and the overall herd. This information can assist with management decisions such as stocking rate, fertilization, supplemental feeding, grouping of cattle, parasite control, and diagnosis of problems. For example, by evaluating the pregnancy rate at each condition score within a herd, the producer will be able to determine if below optimum pregnancy rates are explained by nutritional status (BCS), or other factors such as diseases or bulls.

Taking BCS into consideration when making management decisions offers the most



Cow with BCS of 3

potential for economically improving body condition and pregnancy rates. Separating cows by condition at pregnancy testing or two to three months prior to calving and feeding both groups to calve in BCS 5 or above will maintain high reproductive performance while holding supplemental feed costs to a minimum. The routine use of BCS in each herd will provide needed information to manage the cow herd for a high calf crop and profitability.

For the full report, see EDIS publication SP-144 or contact Bridget for more information.

## Beef Safety & Quality Assurance: An Introduction

*This article is the first in a series of excerpts from the Florida Cow-Calf and Stocker Beef Safety & Quality Assurance Handbook. Look for BQA workshops to be offered by the Polk County Extension Service beginning September of 2008.*

In order to compete for consumers' protein dollars, cattle producers must consistently provide a safe product that is of high quality. Safety and quality factors in beef can be affected by management decisions throughout the production chain—including the cow-calf operation.

Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) is a system of management practices that will further strengthen consumer confidence in beef products. Producers that adopt BQA principles will become more competitive in the cattle market and will help boost the global image of beef originating from the State of Florida and the U.S. The BQA program will help producers identify critical points

in their beef production business that affect quality and safety.

Other segments of the industry, from feedyards to food service, have already adopted Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) and BQA management principles. And to further ensure the safety of products leaving their operations, whether that product is fed cattle or case ready meat products, these companies are looking to do business with cow-calf producers who utilize the same management philosophy.

By adopting BQA principles as a way of doing business, producers can take advantage of these marketing opportunities. In other words, making a commitment to Beef Quality Assurance isn't just the right thing to do for the consumer - its also the right thing to do for you in terms of market access.

The Florida Beef Quality Producer program is one way to show our customers, whether they are calf buyers or consumers, that Florida cattle producers take every step possible to raise beef for them responsibly. Furthermore, every aspect of a BQA program is part of good business management.

For example, the information gained from record keeping in your BQA program will help producers make better business decisions and avoid making costly production mistakes. BQA may also be an important resource for producers who are confronted with additional government regulation and/or possible litigation.

For more information about the BQA Program and how you may participate in the upcoming workshops, please contact Bridget.

### Upcoming Events

#### July

24 PCCA Summer Annual Dinner, 6:30pm, Bartow

#### August

23 Grazing Management 101, Okeechobee

#### September

TBA Beef Quality Assurance Workshop, Bartow

4-5 Advanced Grazing Management School & Tour, LaBelle

10-12 FCA Fall Quarterly Meeting, Sebring

17-18 Wildlife Management Course, Okeechobee, Sarasota, & Polk counties

26 FCA Heifer Sale, Arcadia

#### October

3-4 FCA Ranch Rodeo & Cowboy Heritage Festival, Kissimmee

15 Pasture Weed Field Day

21-23 Reproductive Management School, Arcadia