

2003

Beef ♦ Forage ♦ Range Practices In South Florida

SURVEY COMPILED BY:

Sonja C. Crawford
Extension Agent - II
Hendry County

METHOD FOR OBTAINING INFORMATION:

Information obtained via mailed questionnaires sent through the Range Cattle REC.

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

INTRODUCTION

Information gathered from the 2003 Beef-Forage Survey represents South Florida beef cattle producers in Desoto, Glades, Hardee, Highlands, Hendry, Manatee, Okeecobee, Pasco, Polk, and Sarasota counties.

ABOUT THE BEEF OPERATION

Type of Beef Operations: The beef cattle industry in South Florida is primarily commercial and is represented in Figure 1.

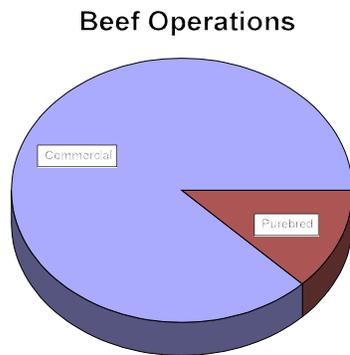


Figure 1: The beef cattle operation.

Plans for the Next Five Years: The results from the survey show that 80% of the South Florida beef cattle producers plan to maintain or increase the size of their operations in the next five years.

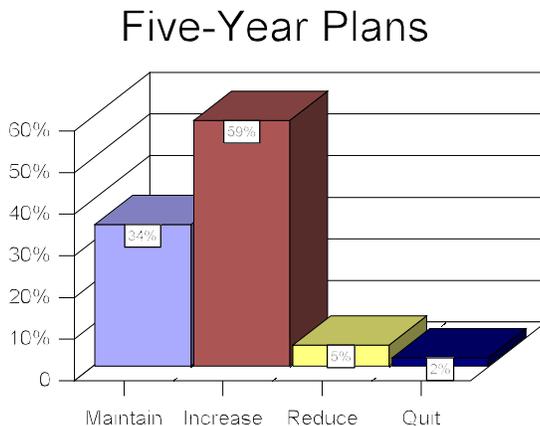


Figure 2: Producer plans for the next five years.

Cattle Operation Profitability: In 2002, approximately 46% of the cattle producers in South Florida indicated their cattle operation made a profit, and 40% stated they broke even.

Business Structure of the Ranch: Forty-two percent (42%) of the beef operations in South Florida are individually owned, and 41% are family owned. Moreover, 20% of the cattle ranches in South Florida are cooperation owned, while the remaining 17% are partnership owned.

Number of Years in the Cattle Business: South Florida beef operation owners have been in the cattle business for an average of 31 years.

Beef Cattle Enterprise Represents Owner's Total Income: Sixty-three percent (63%) of the beef cattle producers in South Florida stated that less than a quarter (25%) of their total income is from their cattle operation.

Beef Cattle Operation Total Income

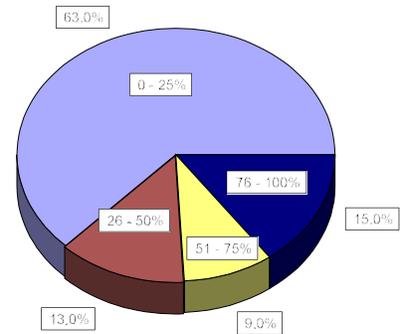


Figure 3: Beef Cattle Producer's Total Income.

REPRODUCTION

Number of Cows and Heifers Exposed: A total of 83,022 cows and 10,518 heifers among the 10 counties surveyed were exposed to bulls in the 2001 - 2002 breeding season.

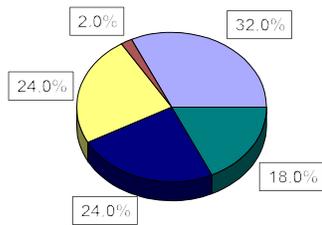
Number of Heifers Exposed Weaned Calves: Sixty percent (60%) of the heifers exposed to bulls weaned a calf.

Number of Cow Exposed Weaned a Calf: Fifty-Six percent (56%) of the cows exposed to bulls weaned a calf.

Replacement Bull Selection: Surveyors provided a list of twelve attributes in which the producers ranked their top three choices, 1 being the most important. First choice chosen was Expected Progeny Differences (EPS's), followed by weaning weight, with the third selection being sire summary.

Testing for Breeding Soundness: The figure (Figure 4) below indicates how often each bull is semen tested for breeding soundness.

Bull Semen Testing



- Each year before breeding season
- Each year after breeding season
- Every 2 or 3 years prior to breeding season
- Only at purchase time
- Never

Figure 4: Bull semen tested for breeding soundness.

Trichomoniasis Checking: Twenty-three percent (23%) of the South Florida beef cattle operations check for Trichomoniasis, whereas 77% do not.

Pregnancy Checked by Palpation: Forty-nine percent (49%) of the South Florida beef cattle operations palpate all of their cows as well as only their dry cows. Veterinarians (58%) checked for pregnancy most often, followed by ranch employees (38%).

Average Pregnancy Rates: The average pregnancy rates from South Florida beef cattle operations are reflected in Figure 5 below.

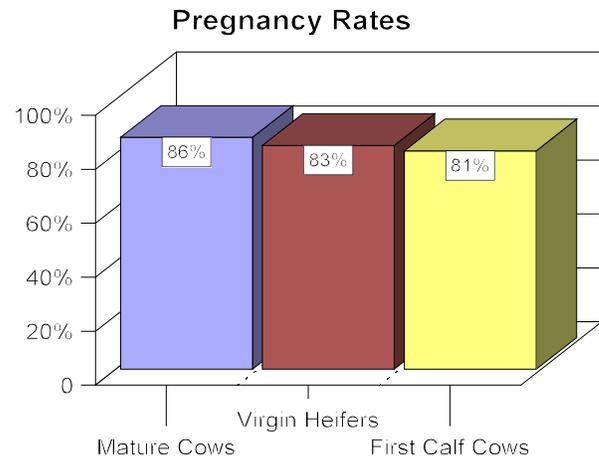


Figure 5: Average pregnancy rates for each division.

Herd Replacements: The results from the survey show that 82% of the South Florida beef cattle operations raise their own herd replacements.

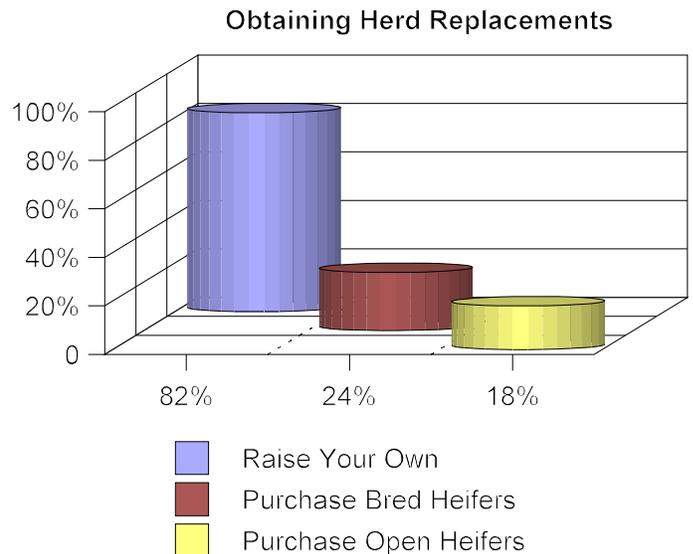


Figure 6: How herd replacements are obtained.

Age Heifers First Calve: The South Florida beef cattle operations indicated that 57% of their heifers calved at 2 years of age.

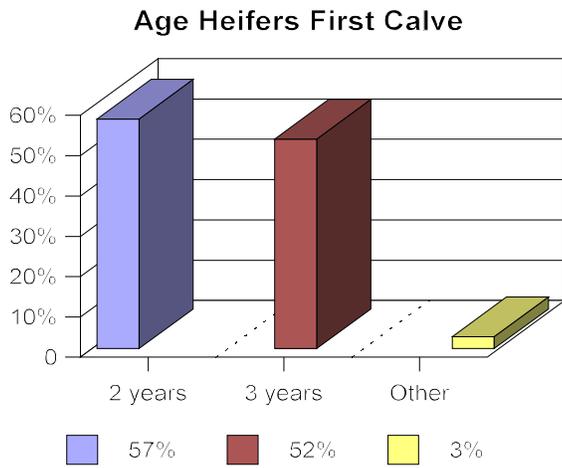


Figure 7: Age heifers first calve.

Heifers Exposed to Bulls: Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the South Florida beef cattle operations do not expose heifers to bulls prior to the mature cow herd.

Culled Cows: South Florida beef cattle producers cull an average of 10% of their cow herd each year.

Limitations to Reproduction: Producers were provided a list of four attributes to rank their top three choices, 1 being the most important. The highest ranked reproduction limitation was nutrition, followed by management, with parasites ranking third.

MARKETING

Weaning Calves: The average weight of calves at weaning is 454 pounds. The average age of calves when marketed is 9 months with an average weight of 450 pounds.

Calf Marketing Methods: Eighty-five percent (85%) of the producers sold their calves through the auction market. Many ranchers indicated multiple methods for marketing.

Marketing Method for Calves

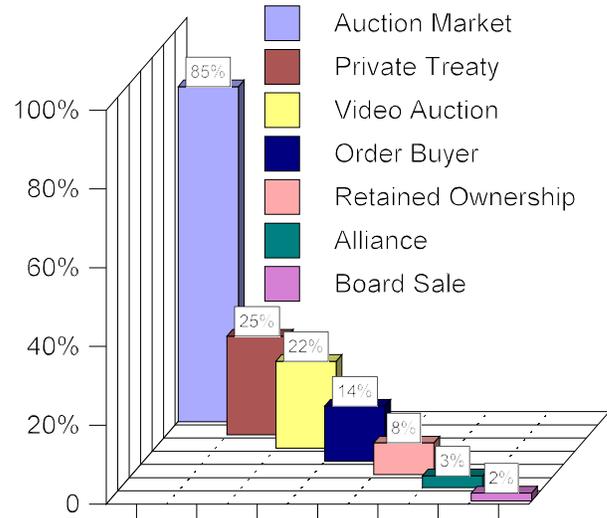


Figure 8: Calf marketing methods.

Marketing Preparation: Ranchers were asked to report all methods used to ready calves for marketing and is reflected in Figure 9 below.

Attributes Performed Before Marketing

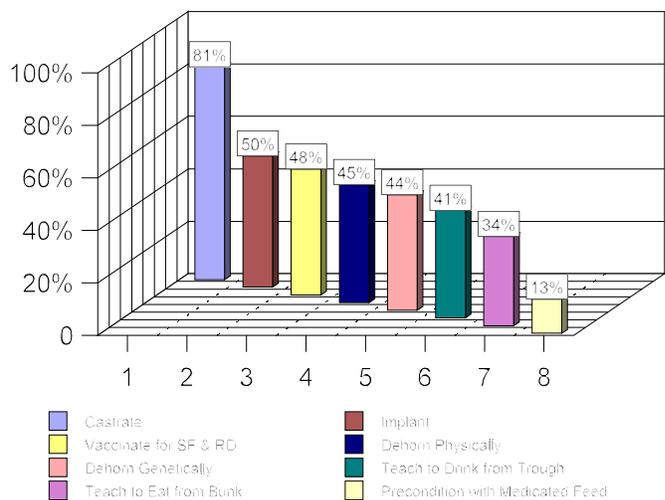


Figure 9: Methods used before marketing calves.

PRODUCTION

Cow/Calf Identification: Sixty-two percent (62%) of the South Florida beef cattle producers identify each cow, and 34% of these producers identify each calf.

Beef Herd Records: Sixty-five percent (65%) of the producers in South Florida indicated that they kept production records with 41% keeping computerized records.

Records for Selection and Culling: Forty-four percent (44%) of the producers use herd records to select heifers and/or cull cows.

HERD HEALTH

Control of External Parasites: Ninety-nine percent (99%) of the producers in South Florida controlled external parasites on their cattle.

External Parasite Control Methods: The pour-on method was the most commonly used among producers in South Florida, with dust bags being the least common method. Often, producers used more than one method.

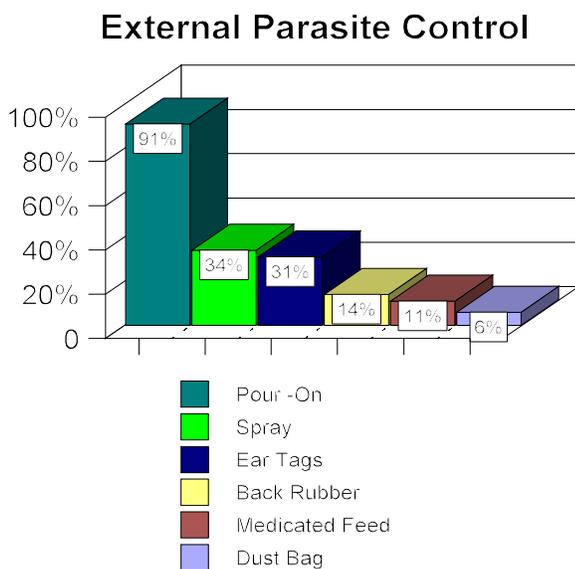


Figure 10: Methods of external parasite control.

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

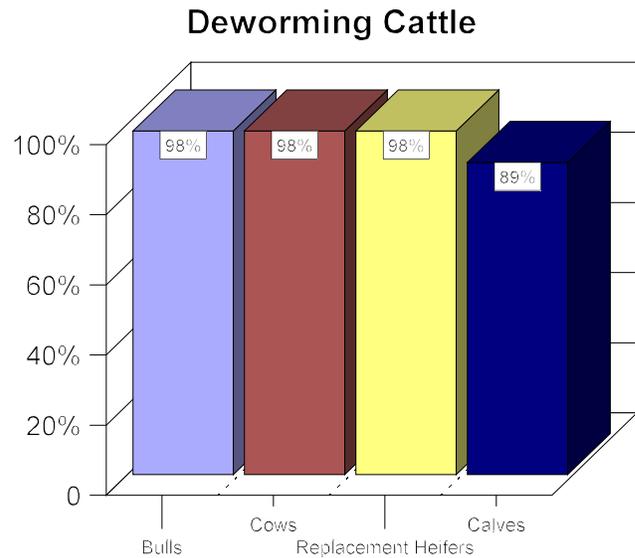


Figure 11: Percent of producers deworming their herd.

Liver Fluke Treatment: Results from the survey indicated that 74% of the producers in South Florida treat for liver flukes.

Vaccination Program: More of the South Florida beef cattle producers (59%) vaccinated for blackleg than any other disease. See chart below.

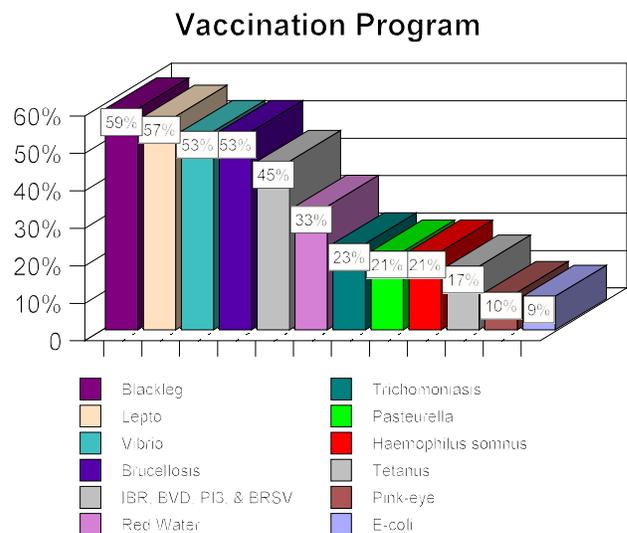


Figure 12: Diseases producers vaccinate against.

NUTRITION

Winter Forages Used: Native range was used by 69% of the producers in South Florida as a winter forage source, followed by hay (65%). Many producers used several sources of winter forage.

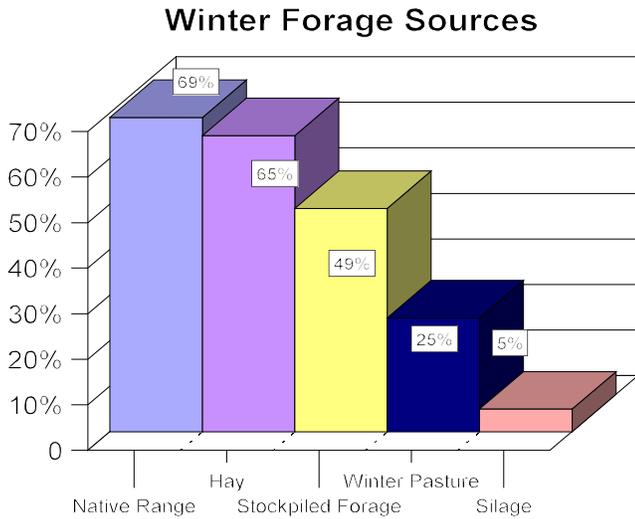


Figure 13: Sources of winter forage.

Winter Protein Supplements: Cattle producers selected supplements used during the winter months. Commonly, an operation used more than one form of supplement. Sixty percent of the producers used molasses as a protein supplement during the winter months.

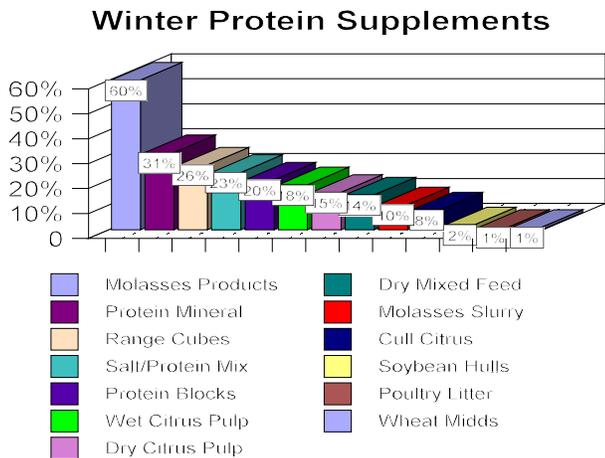


Figure 14: Sources of winter protein supplements.

Analyzing Hay: Only 15% of the producers indicated that they analyzed their hay or silage for forage quality.

Analyzing Pasture: Only 23% of the producers stated they analyzed their pasture grass for forage quality.

Ammonia Treatment Awareness: Eighty-four percent (84%) of the producers indicated they were aware hay can be treated with ammonia to improve nutritional quality. However, only nine percent of the producers treated hay with ammonia.

Body Condition Score (BCS): Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the surveyed producers used the Body Condition Scoring System to start and/or stop supplementation. Furthermore, 77% percent of the cattle producers used the system as an indication of how much to feed. December was the average month to begin supplementing with April being the average month to stop supplementing.

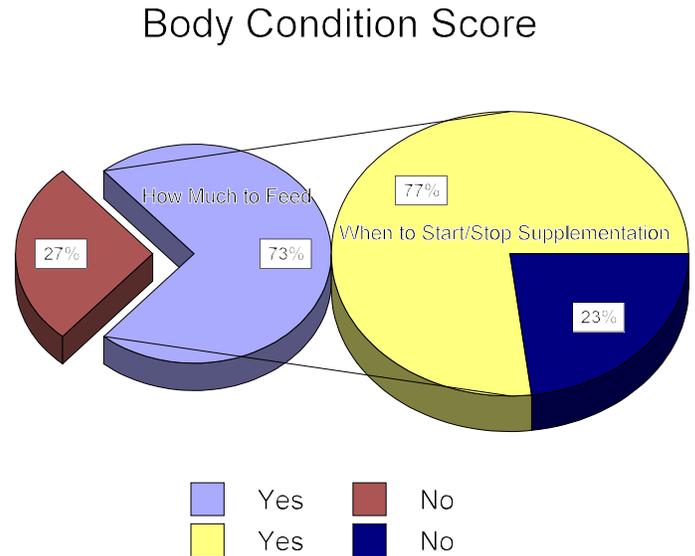


Figure 15: Do you use your cow's Body Condition Score to determine when and how to supplement.

Mineral Supplementation: Ninety-nine percent (99%) of the South Florida cattle producers supplement their cattle with some form of mineral.

FORAGE PRODUCTION

Rotational Grazing: Eighty-nine percent (89%) of those who responded indicated they rotationally graze their pasture(s).

Determining Fertilization Program: Approximately 52% of the producers used previous experience to determine their hay or pasture fertilization program.

Fertilization Program Information

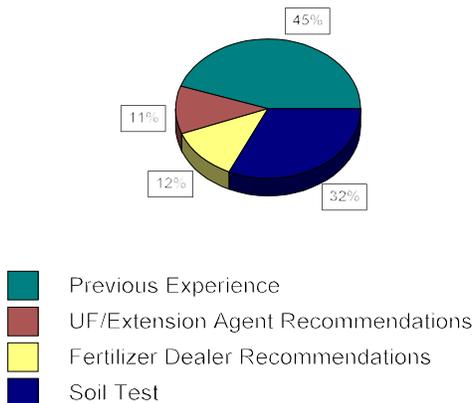


Figure 16: Important factor to determine fertilization program.

Organic Waste: Fourteen percent (14%) of the producers use some type of organic waste on their pasture (sludge or biosolids, poultry litter, etc.).

Pasture Damage: Forty-three percent (43%) of the producers stated they had damage to their pasture in the last three years from mole crickets.

Most Troublesome Weeds: Tropical Soda Apple is ranked as the most troublesome concerned weed followed by smutgrass as the next bothersome weed then dog fennel.

Weed Control Methods: Mowing or chopping are employed to combat weeds by most of the producers (89%) in South Florida.

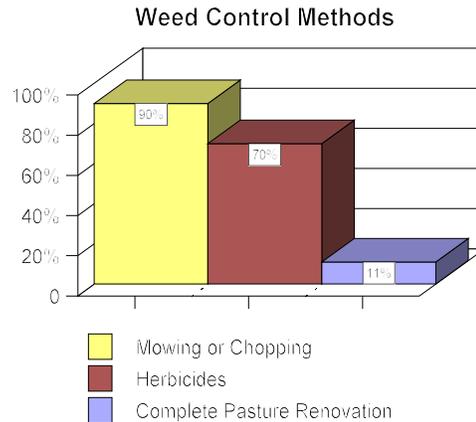


Figure 17: Weed control methods performed by producers.

ENVIRONMENTAL

Open Water Areas: Eighty-four percent (84%) of the producers in South Florida have open water areas on their property. The survey indicated that 89% of the producers allow cattle to have access to open water areas.

Water Troughs: Approximately 57% of the producers provide water troughs in their pasture, even with accessible open water areas.

Feeding Around Open Water Source: Of the producers that responded, 79% of the producers feed mineral, hay or supplements more than 100 feet from open water areas.

Water Quality: Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the South Florida beef cattle producers adjusted management practices adopted from the “Water Quality Best Management Practices for Cow/Calf Operations in Florida” manual to minimize effects on water quality.

OTHER

UF Cooperative Extension Service: Ninety-two percent (92%) of the producers indicated that the service of the UF Cooperative Extension Service to Florida's Beef Industry was satisfactory.

Information Sources: Eighty-four percent (84%) of the producers obtained information on beef production and/or management practices from other cattlemen.

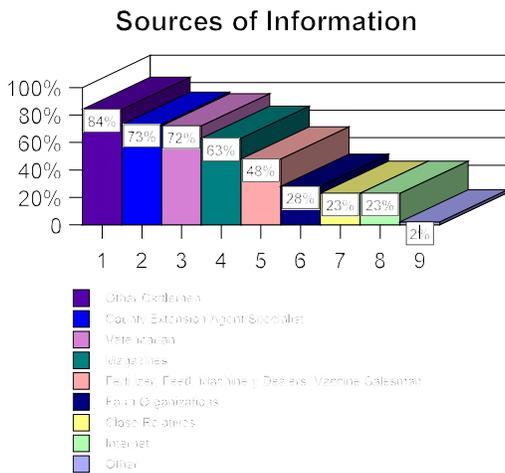


Figure 18: Place producers gathered information.

Problems Facing the Beef Cattle Industry: Nine (9) issues were ranked among the South Florida cattle producers. Price the rancher receives for his cattle ranked as the most important followed by consumer concerns with the retail price of beef as the third important concern and urban encroachment being the least important concern.

